

THE WIRE



Issue 112 June 1993
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FURTHER INTO MUSIC

music in the realm of bodily desire

marvin gaye — tortured soul

riot grrrr! — what happened?

gay disco • torch songs

sexual drive in rhythm and melody

orbital • red house painters

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sounding off live

**News items
should reach us
by Monday 7 June
for inclusion in the
July issue**

**Sounding Off
is compiled by
Andrew Potchecary**

■ This year's Platform 3 festival takes as its theme "Play me some 20th Century music before it's over." The week of music from 21-26 June sees the emphasis on collaborations — Joanna McGregory's classical piano with Human Chain's specially commissioned new work (21), John Surman solo followed by the EOS Ensemble playing Steve Mardland and Mark Isaacs to video accompaniment by Ori Aziz (22), more video from The Common Sense combines with Jane Chapman's harpsichord (23), and later in the week there's work for piano-electronics-computer-tape-and-slide, plus a string quartet, a brass quintet and a jazz trio. Take your pick, or mix. Each evening starts at 8pm, most are double bills and it's all at the ICA (box office 071 930 3647).

■ The Aldeburgh Festival in Surrey spans a range of classical music but concentrates, in its 46th incarnation, on the work of modern Japanese composer Toru



Toru
Takemitsu

Takemitsu. Three films featuring Takemitsu's compositions will be screened: *Ran* (14), the Akira Kurosawa movie for which he provided the soundtrack, *Thirteen Steps Around Toru Takemitsu* (17) and *Dream Window Reflections On A Japanese Garden* (19). Plus there will be a performance of Takemitsu's festival commission *Archeology S* (18). The rest of the festival (which runs from 11-27 June) ranges from Bach to Britten, the Brindis to the Borodin String Quartet and other festival commissions by Peter Paul Nash (19) and Philip Granger (26) (box office 0728 453543).

■ Saxophonist John Harle can be heard at two festivals in London this month — during the Highbury Festival (11-20, box office 071 704 2165) he's with string musicians Opus 20 presenting a selection of contemporary British works which will be recorded by the BBC (18). A day earlier Harle appears at the Spitalfields Festival (9-30, box office 071 377 1362) where with pianist John Lenehan he performs an hour of Debussy, Michael Nyman and Chick Corea's *Children's Songs* (17). The Highbury Festival also includes The Haydn Chamber Orchestra (17), The London Jazz Orchestra (19) and a gospel night (20). The Spitalfields event includes a range of classically orientated performances.

■ Apropos of none of the previous is a London's Secret Spaces' commission, *The Institution of Rot*. Perhaps best summarised from the



Rot

PHOTO: GUYA

press release, it is "an installation which crosses boundaries between private and public space and makes use of sound projection creating a total visual and aural environment." The venue is 109 Corbyn Street, London, N4 (8-12 June, 12pm to 6pm, plus a live performance with a meal for limited numbers at 8pm on 11-12 June). The event comes courtesy of the London Musician's Collective and features exhibited objects from sculptor Crow, music from keyboard player Nick Coudry, samplers and processors Paul Obermayer and Richard Barrett, plus Adam Bohman exploring the musical potential of everyday objects (More information on 081 291 9856).

■ If you're abroad in Slovenia (or nearby in Austria, Hungary or Italy) this month, you might want to take a detour to the Druga Godba international folk and new music festival (31 May — 5 June) which takes place in the Ljubljana Summer Theatre and the KUD France Preseren. Featuring Russian composer/musician Boris Kovac

and a chamber ensemble (1) and an evening called Unknown Europe (2) with three bands from Slovenia, Netherlands and Austria, the festival culminates with a night of African music from Egypt's Musicians of the Nile, performing traditional Arabic folk music, and Farafina, the balafon-drums-vocal ensemble from Burkina Faso (5). There is more information from Jeunesses Musicales de Slovenie (38 61 322 570).

■ An A to Z of jazz dates this month. A is for Alacazam featuring ex-District Sixers saxophonist Harrison Smith and trumpeter Jim Dvorak with Alistair Gavin, Mano Castronari and Tony Marsh at Pymms in Derby (19) and The Albert in Bristol (20). At the other end, Z is for Zap Jazz, an "open category night" with our very own Industrial Improvise deviants God (don't forget yer earplugs!) (2) and a Eugene Chadbourne (ex-Shockability/Jimmy Carl Black (ex-Mothers of Invention) collaboration (16) from 9pm — 1am at The Zap in Brighton (0273 821588). Chadbourne and Black also have a string of further dates in the UK this month. Details are a bit hazy as we go to press, but try ringing 071 837 7557 for more information.

■ From all over the rest of the jazz alphabet: the ubiquitous pianist/saxophonist Bheki Mseleku tours with stellar Americans Marvin 'Smitty' Smith and Michael Bowie. They are at Cheltenham Town Hall (24), Glastonbury (25), St. Georges Concert Hall, Bradford (26), Jazz On A Summer's Day at Alexandra Palace, London (27) (which also features a host of star jazz types) and Warwick University, Coventry (28). The Newcastle Playhouse sees the British premiere of Andy



Bheki
Mseleku

PHOTO: GUYA

Sheppard's Big Co-Motion (4) which, self-descriptively, adds to the In Co-Motion line-up. That's part of the Newcastle Jazz Festival which (complete with a brochure of Paul Elliman-era Wire design) runs from 1-6 June. Our own Brian Priestly appears with his Special Septet at Pizza Express, London (19) and The Bull's Head, Chislehurst (27) plus he will be running a jazz piano workshop jointly with Howard Riley at Goldsmiths College, London



PHOTO: ANDREW PETERCRAFT

SE14 on 19/20 June at a cost of £50 (Enquiries 081 692 7171 ext 2029). And Bernardo Sasseti, a Portuguese pianist who has played with a host of names, has a number of dates in June: with Art Farmer at Pizza Express (25); with his trio of Wayne Batchelor and Ralph Salmins at the Jazz Cafe (lunchtime on 26); with not-frequently-enough-heard-saxophonist Brian Edwards at Vic Maylors, London (26); with Jean Toussaint Quartet at The Albert Inn, Bristol (27); at the Blue Note, Southend (28); in trio again at China Jazz, Camden Town (29) and again at Pizza Express (30). Finally the excellent Freddie Hubbard has a one-off (and is always worth catching) at the Union Chapel, Compton Terrace, London N1 on 13 June

■ One highlight at North London's Jazz Cafe this month is a five-day residency (15-19) featuring Norman Connors and The Starship Orchestra. Connors's 70s tracks for the Buddha/Curtom label ("Captain Connors", "You Are My Starship", "Butterfly", etc) have long been icons of Rare Groove. His latest album, *Remember Who You Are* (Hogarth), is a bit of a quiet step into mainstream Street Soul, but live, the Philadelphia bandleader and

drummer can still summon the cosmic echoes. Further details on 071 284 4358

■ Last month we gave the Company Week line-up. Since then Don Byron (see our feature in issue 110) has been confirmed as the ninth participant, leaving one space to be filled. Company Week participant Alan Wilkinson has a six-date tour, meanwhile, with the Hesson/Wilkinson/Fell band at the Black Lion, Manchester (5); The Foot and Mouth Club, Sheffield (6); The Terrace Club, Leeds (7); The Arts Centre, York (8) and the Rose and Crown, Hackney, London (9)

■ As vinyl goes the way of all flesh the ICA hosts a *Vinyl Requiem* at Union Chapel, Compton Avenue, London N1. It's a large-scale collaboration between composer Philip Jeck and audio-visual artist Lol Sargent, featuring 180 vintage cassette record players and 100s of second-hand records manipulated by Jeck under Sargent's computer-generated images and colours. Pay your respects on 4 and 5 June at 10pm. (ICA box office 071 930 3647)



■ For those seeking nights of Asian Techno trance club there's a double gg of Emperor Sly and the brilliant Trans-Global Underground at Strawberry Fair, Cambridge (5). Trans-Global Underground, meanwhile continue on with appearances at Megadog, Broton Academy, London (19); The Moles Club, Bath (24) and Glastonbury (25). They are also playing at all points throughout the country throughout July. For more information call 071 221 7931

an editor's idea

My sister's friend's sister once told me, at a flat-warming party, as we gazed desolately at the still-unpacked boxes of my even then ludicrously overstocked record collection, that far from being a family alarming turn-off, such things intrigued women. Perhaps she was being kind. Even if she's right, I think relying on this to the exclusion of all other modes of charm would probably be a mistake.

What's interesting, though, is the automatic assumption that men collect and women look on, tolerantly or otherwise. And yet women buy just as many records as men. No doubt the gender behaviour pattern isn't actually anything like so sharply delineated, but the perception's there. It may not be clear exactly who makes up which group, but there clearly are two groups, and we obviously clearly like to believe that gender comes into it, whether or not there's a sociological truth behind the assumption.

In this month's issue, we open up several routes into a understanding of the ways music is used to negotiate the bends and collisions of sexuality — to ease the seductions, to point up the confrontations, to focus identification, to dramatize the aftermath of all the above...

Perhaps collectors — and all decent critics are in the end collectors, however unwillingly — are a little in flight from some of this, into a world of abstract mastery, of lists and categories and positioning and qualities, a territory of ultimate purpose (and posthumous achievement). As a result, their ideal and serious perspective can fall a long way from the body, from groove, from the vital real of personal and trivial feeling, from a lot of the actual social fun of experiencing music, arguing about it, using it.

The history of how this has been dealt with is long, convoluted and unfinished. When almost all of the supposed polarities in music (classical/romantic, classical/jazz, rock/pop, modern/postmodern, white/black) are drawn up simply to shadow this deeper split, it's a history that can take sudden, strange turns. Once faced and explored honestly, the split can dissolve and mutate, until you can no longer quite tell what 'feeling' is, or 'seriousness'. As for where passion lies, well, some people mind more about the records they live with than the people they live with — and who could fail to be intrigued by that odd fact? **MARK SINKER**

In July's *The Wire*, Michael Nyman, Wynton Marsalis, Aspects Of The American Dream: on sale 24 June.

sounding off

■ For more future-present Ambient Techno experiences, Megadog are presenting the unmissable Miki Circus Tour headlining Orbital (see feature, page 16). All dates feature Orbital and the Megadog crew with support permed from a pool of Aphex Twin, Drum Club, Eat Static, System 7. The dates are: The Event, Brighton (9); Anson Rooms, Bristol (11); University, Cardiff (12); Rock City, Nottingham (16) and Brixton Academy, London (19).



PHOTO: DAVID BOONING

■ If you bought this month's issue as soon as it hit the streets (and if not, why not?), there's just time for us to tell you about two gigs featuring brilliant North Carolina quartet Polvo at The Camden Falcon (27 May) and The Garage (29), both in North London. For further initiation into the group's warped, post-Magic Band jazzcore workouts check their *Today's Active Lifestyles* album (reviewed in this month's Soundcheck). And if you do miss the group's May shows, don't fret, they'll be doing a full-length UK tour in late June/early July. More details next month (if we get 'em in time).

■ Advance warning that WOMAD will be up and running again in July. The organisations major UK event, a weekend at Rymerhead, Reading, 16-18 July, will have the usual broad outlook: Mighty Sparrow, Omou Sangare, Nusrat Fateh Ali

Khan, Steve Williamson, Daniel Lanois, Nagma Akhtar and more from Trans-Global Underground to name only a minority. Further details next month.

■ For those interested in the politics of "world music", Music Works in Brixton, London are running a seminar on the making of "world music" and the creation of Western markets entitled *Exploitation Or Liberation?* (11). The evening costs £2 (£1 concessions and free to members). Details from 071 737 6103.

■ Network, a CD project co-ordinated by Sheffield-based composer/improvisor Martin Archer, is looking for "miniatures" from creative musicians/soundsmiths, known or unknown. Any style of music can be submitted. The title "miniatures" applies to the required

length of any submitted pieces, which must have a maximum duration of 90 seconds. Therefore all budding Zorns, jingle-writers, improvisors and short concerto composers, etc, send an SAE for full details to Martin Archer, 5 Oakholme Mews, Sheffield S10 3FX. The final product will contain approximately 50 segments which will be edited together for release. The production costs will be shared between the contributors (and a corresponding share of the finished product will be similarly split).

TV & RADIO

■ Channel 4 starts a new season of *Sound Stuff* on Sundays (7-8pm) starting on 13 June. That first Sunday features *Ward Nightmare* directed by Ray Davies (of The Kinks). It's an exploration "into the soul of a tormented genius" as it

live from cambridge

Cambridge's pulse has begun to throb again: the city now has a solid triangle of sussed and better-promoted venues, as well as its first serious what's on guide, *Night And Day*. The Junction is a kind of leading-bay, equipped with everything the modern lugger needs except atmosphere. Even so, Back To The Planet's ultraviolet hellbroth soon had the assembled part-time travellers spazz-dancing in Mufak Waste contortions. Ska sn't really the thing just now, but between the Selector/Eruption deviators they hacked into an aggressively demerited jungle groove. At the same venue, Nitin Sawhney brought flute and tablas to augment his keyboard-centred mid-Asia fusion compositions, despite some seductive overblowing and heart-stopping pianistic leaps, the sound remained slightly undernourished.

Arrested Development at the Corn Exchange didn't need no armed guard: drawing on Si's concept of the democratic "family" (everyone gets a chance to rap) they agitate without resorting to militant imagery, and their sound system

sharply revealed the details in the mix.

Rolling up for Polyphony Night at Jesus College Chapel I found Cambridge Tavener Choir performing the jewelled, incense-laden cathedral music of the Spanish *New World* in anticipation of their first CD release, their imaginative director Owen Rees attempts to approximate the actual occasion of a Renaissance mass rather than naively running through a single work, and supplies the audience/congregation with copious accessible programme notes. Next step is authentic dress, people. Youthful pianist Martin Leigh in the same venue revealed the rippling vertebrae that unify Schoenberg's *Klavierstück Op 33a*, became distracted during Haydn's creamy, incense *Sonata no 60*, and finally tilted Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque* with a special degree of magic: all bell-tolls and owls in the Tuscan night, his lips nearly brushing the keys in concentration.

At the revitalised Boat Race pub, Hassan Erraji's Arabesque brought their own potted

palms and entranced an olive-munching crowd with long-drawn percussive interplay between the leader's ud and the pile of saucapan-like Arabic drums that made up their kit. An origin of our house-rhythm fixation is embedded within the thrilling offbeats and understrokes of this hypnotic, earthy music. Later at the same venue Bradford's *Fun-Da-Mental* made the connection explicit. I find the hoods and covered faces an incidental pantomime effect: next to the coiling sampled stars and eardrum-buzzing Persian instruments unnameably metamorphosing into searing Techno-bytes. It's a terrific, triumphant show.

I stumbled on Pram supporting a disappointingly bland Hair and Skin Trading Company and marvelled at their extreme-frequency blend of sawn bass and facile toy synth, swilled along by a drumbo nudged to the same metronome as Cam's Jaki Lebeszetz, but the following week I heard the group broken up under the strain. Can I suggest yawl suck toes and make up? **ROB YOUNG**



Lona Foote, with Louis
Stephenson (l) and
Wilbur Morris, 1989

OBITUARY: LONA FOOTE

■ New York's jazz, new music and modern dance scenes lost a dedicated, insightful photographer when Lona Foote died age 42, following a five-year struggle with breast cancer, on 15 April, writes Howard Mondel. A patient portraitist whose work appeared in *downbeat*, *Eor*, *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice* and on record and CD covers, Lona also had the reflexes to capture unexpected moments of musical inspiration, energy and interpersonal exchange in visual images with her pre-Second World War cameras. A program consultant to the Alternative Museum and Experimental Intermedia Foundation, Lona's activist opinions were strong. Though the focus and contrast of her prints were sometimes soft, her vision discovered essences of America's cultural nightlife. Truth, wisdom and heat are finally in her photographs.

... AND FINALLY

■ Anybody still looking for the Phil Glass/Alfred Schnittke Violin Concerto/Concerto Grosso No 5 (Deutsche Grammophon DG 437 091), which got a rave review in last month's Soundcheck, will have to hold out for a copy because it's now not being released until the end of the year. It was a case of crossed wires which led us to include the review too early. Oopses, here's another slip-up. When we ran Grel Marcus's "Art Of The Living Dead" feature in issue 109, we forgot to include the following acknowledgement: "Originally published in *American Esquire*, August 1992." Apologies to all

letter from gambia

Morning's darkness is cut by the sound of bials calling out the first prayers of the day, distorting horribly through the mosque's cheap PA system. Sounds of movement, fires being set, bread-vans and breakfast. Then the small boys, Waaly, Jibby and Little, drumming on tin cans in detailed imitation of their fathers — Soussou drummers Ali Kaissa and Thomas Camara. Another boy stomps round screaming wildly down a cardboard tube in impersonation of my soprano saxophone. On the radio a traditional Mandinka griot with his kora sings the praises of the President and the country. The adults in the compound shriek with laughter and scoff "What he is singing is nothing but lies! He knows nothing!" Then the news in five tongues — Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Jola and English. As usual nothing much has happened today in the Gambia.

Later we play in the compound, or if it is Ramadan or a time of mourning, we might load the drums on our backs and hike into the bush where only the Jolas work — who (being at least nominal Christians) care nothing for the finer points of Islamic correctness. Today myself and my friend and host Muhammad Jahman Silla play with some Fula musicians who show me strange circular Serdu flute melodies. I try to keep the rhythm while they yelp and holler unearthly vocalised solos, but I am marking the time in a completely different place to their feet. Afterwards they accompany myself and Jahman as we play some free improvisation. The gulls we hear each other across are vast and fascinating, all the more so for the brief moments in which they are bridged. The task is as hopeless as it is beautiful.

Times are difficult for musicians here. Those who've got the chance have moved on to richer seams — Dakar, Abidjan, Paris, New York. There is little support from the government, no recording industry and little work other than with drumming groups taking it for the tourists, or the dream of a Western tour.

After the quiet heat of the afternoon, evening brings the clatter of dominoes and conversation. By night there are radios and cassettes everywhere — Kasse Mady, some Senegalese rap, the omnipresent lit of 70s reggae, Youssou N'dour, Phil Collins. Further into the distance I can hear drums and the excitement and bustle of dancing. Some nights this is just stuff laid on for tourists in the pseudo-African village down the road, other nights you might hear the Jola drum and saxophone derisives of Lasana and Darbo Djata surrounded by hundreds of singing and dancing women, or the harsh crackle of Musa M'Boop's Wolof drumming with its shrieking declaratory vocals mixed up to distortion and feedback level, sounding for all the world like James Brown meets Test Department in hell.

Unfamiliar voices, a dog howls, the wind rattles my corrugated iron roof: the sound of this loudest of continents carries long into the night. **RICHARD SCOTT**

follows the rehearsal and recording of record producer and homage specialist Hal Wilner's all-star tribute to Charles Mingus. Davies says, "I want to break down the barriers normally associated with jazz and take the music of Charles Mingus to a wider audience. We will see other artists discover Mingus the person as they explore the music." Performers include Keith Richards, Elvis Costello, Vernon Reid, Dr John and Henry Threadgill. The following Sunday (20) is a programme on Berlin-based Estonian Arvo Part, which combines intimate family footage with rehearsal, recording and performance film and focuses on the inseparability of the composer's everyday and creative life. Laffy in — June is a prog of harmonica player Larry Adler (27). The season continues in July.

Jazz on Radio Three continues with the final four parts of the six part Dizzy Gillespie tribute (1, B, 15, 22 June) on Tuesdays from 4.30-5pm (repeated Thursdays 10.15pm-12.45am). That's followed by a searper on Coleman Hawkins (same times from 29 June). Radio Three's regular Saturday evening concert broadcasts continue with John Surman and the Brass Project from the London Jazz Festival (5) and the Brecker Brothers Band recorded at The RFH (19), both going out between 10.30pm-12.30am. And Brian Morton's *Impressions* series features a look at recent jazz books with Alyn Shipton (12) and a set from Take 3 — featuring Lika Dasical, Louise Elliott and Josephina Cupido — with a Lika Dasical interview on 26 June, both programmes run from 11.10pm-12.30am.





SMIRNOFF

THE OTHER SIDE.

Val Wilmer

writer/photographer

Val Wilmer has been a significant figure in British jazz since the 50s. She first started taking pictures as a teenager and fan of the music, but by the mid-60s had developed both a deeper sense of purpose in her photography and a deeper understanding of jazz. Since that time, as a journalist working in both words and pictures, she has striven to highlight the radical cultural politics woven into so much Black jazz, and also to undercut the false glamour periodically associated with musicians struggling to express themselves creatively in the hardest circumstances. Her 1973 V&A solo exhibition, "The Face Of Black Music", was not simply groundbreaking by being the V&A's first solo exhibition; it also made the wider public aware, often for the first time, of the lived conditions of many African American artists at the time. *As Serious As Your Life* (first published in 1970) emphasises one of her greatest journalistic gifts — an ability to listen in it, a series of musicians (and their wives!) connected with Free Jazz in particular talk about their times, their beliefs and their music. Translated into photography, this ability to listen allows her subjects and their settings to tell their — rather than her — story. Her story is told, nevertheless, in her highly entertaining autobiography *Mama Said There'd Be Days Like These* (1989).

Passionate, committed, often angry, always cogent, Wilmer's influence on the British jazz scene is probably incalculable — certainly she has tried to keep it alert to the genesis of this music, in struggle and deprivation, and to the enormous contribution to 20th century thought of Black American musicians, from Armstrong and earlier right up to the present. □





Clockwise from top left:
Julia goes gigging: Julia Doyle,
Brixton, 1982.

The Homecoming: Terri Maa-
koshie Quaye, Accra, Ghana,
1970. Dewey and Ted
rehearsing: Dewey Redman and
Ted Daniel, Lower East Side,
New York, 1973.

The Hawk talks: Coleman
Hawkins, Ronnie Scott's, 1967.



Jazz — Roots & Branches, Val Wilmer's exhibition of jazz and blues photography, is showing at The Special Photographers Company from 1 June to 24 July, at 21 Kensington Park Road, London W11 2EU (in addition to her work, the basement gallery is exhibiting jazz photos by Herman Leonard, William Claxton, Gered Markowitz and others to be announced). Photos hand-printed and signed by Val will be available for sale. Many pictures in the exhibition will be previously unseen, and we are pleased to be able to preview some of them in these pages.

flitting in the face of current rock fashion, where style—in the shape of a grunge/pop template—often predominates over content, the music of Red House Painters is meticulously detailed and utterly self-possessed. The classic pop song format is of paramount importance—but stretched out at length, becoming sparse, skeletal, sometimes languid, sometimes desolate. In this slow-motion world, language is also pared down—vocalist Mark Kozalek's sometimes uncomfortably personal words are a crucial part of the equation. Not for nothing have comparisons been made with Big Star, American Music Club, even Nick Drake.

Ever since the release last year of the group's debut album *Down Colourful Hill*, critical praise has been heaped on the San Francisco-based four-piece. But their ascendance has been no overnight affair. The group played their first shows early in 1990, when their music was still moulded to a trad version of US indie rock. Record company interest was non-existent. Increasingly dissatisfied with this direction, Kozalek set about reconstructing the group's sound in his own image, foregrounding the voice and severely reining in the music in terms of its volume and speed. "I really wanted my lyrics to be the up front thing about it," he explains. "But I wasn't used to singing with the band playing quietly. It's what I wanted to do but didn't really know how to go about doing it, because I was really nervous out about it. But I stuck with it, no matter how much the guys in the band told me their friends didn't like me or their girlfriends wished we played faster. I didn't give a shit. All my life I've been attracted to slow music and songs."

Opinion began to shift after fan Mark Eitzel of American Music Club sent a demo tape of the songs that would eventually appear on *Down Colourful Hill* to 4AD. "The only thing that made it turn around was him giving it the OK," says Kozalek. "I don't know about here, but in America, unless someone says it's OK to like this band, no one's going to like them. That's just the way it is. Before the album came out we opened for American Music Club

and everyone's looking at their watch wondering when we're getting off stage. And then the songs got played on the radio on demo night and no one gave a shit. But as soon as (4AD boss) Ivo Watts-Russell said, 'These are good songs, I'm going to take these exact same songs and put them on a record', then all of a sudden they became good songs and worth checking into. It's the name of the game, so just kind of accept that."

The group's eponymously titled new album is a double set, containing the first fruits of a recent 23 song recording marathon (the overspill should be available in the autumn—"Not just the extra shit that didn't get on the other records," asserts Kozalek). It carries the decelerated, internalised moods of its predecessor to further extremes. During the recording Kozalek insisted on take after take to get the songs (his songs) exactly right—snipping the arrangements to the bone, or radically distorting them in the mixing process. "Ours is the kind of music that's got to be played right," he explains. "Some of it's simple, but the dynamics have to be right, the build up has got to be right and it's got to have the right feeling—that's really important." He also gives a telling indication of his defining role in the group when he says, "If you walked into our rehearsal room when I wasn't there you'd hear completely different things to what's going on when I am around."

Kozalek's unflinching, emotionally direct lyrics are a long way up from the standard bedst-miserabilist fare, but they still act as an irresistible lure to indie pop's bedrock constituency of obsessive, alienated young males. "I think that's fine but I don't want to make friends that way" he says. "I've already got fan mail. I got a letter from a guy who sent me his poetry and I've been approached by people who think I've got all the answers. I've met them and it's true—they're people who are totally on the edge and fucked up. There's nothing I can do for them. I can't help them and I don't think it's romantic. If someone writes me a letter I don't have to open it. They like

what I do and that's great, but I don't want to get involved with anyone in that way."

It's not yet a fan club—and after that perhaps never will be—but the ground swell of opinion that Red House Painters are something special is escalating rapidly, especially in this country. Their first UK show last November (the group are touring here again this month) sold out and was remarkable for the way the punters made an effort to meet this intense, unfamiliar music halfway—rock audiences aren't renowned for giving new bands such time and space in which to work.

"I don't see why it's such a problem," says Kozalek. "When I go to see a band I feel that if a singer is going to go on stage and get behind a mic then he should say something that you can hear, that really means something to him and hopefully to you too. But you'll be ready to walk out of the room and say, 'This is what this guy's about—I'm not into it, or, 'This guy's great!' When you leave, you should always know what the singer is about."

DAVE MORRISON



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THE NEW CD FROM HOLGER CZUKAY
"AN AMBIENT MASTERPIECE"

having just released an album of material by Julius Hemphill (*Diminutive Mysteries*, reviewed *The Wire* 11.1), saxophonist and composer Tim Berne feels he is finally getting to the point where he is no longer in thrall to the influence of his old teacher. It's a significant release for him, a major step in a relationship which has lasted the best part of 20 years. Hemphill gives a lot of weight to interpretation and was delighted with the way Berne and his band filled out the six skeletal compositions he wrote for them.

"He gave me the music and then I told him, 'I'll give you the tape when we're done'," says Berne. "I think he enjoyed that aspect of it. Part of my studies with him involved a certain degree of him throwing out ideas but not filling in the blanks and this was in a sense the graduation. If he'd handed me all the answers it wouldn't have made as much sense for me to be doing the project."

Though Hemphill is probably best known as an ex-member of the World

Tim Berne

saxophonic extremes



PHOTO: ANDREW DOWLING/ARTIST

Saxophone Quartet, he's maintained a reputation since the 70s for his post-free compositions, without ever gaining the popularity of the current, increasingly syncratic crop of avant garde US players. Berne, as well as his affiliations to Hemphill and the latter's 70s contemporaries, has been prominent among the newer musicians, notably for his work with John Zorn (on the abrasive *Spy Vs Spy* Ornette tribute) and Bill Fissell. Spanning two generations of improvisors, he incorporated David Sanborn into the band for the Hemphill album, which might at first seem an unlikely choice.

"Sanborn grew up with Julius in St Louis and had played with him a lot and knew his music," explains Berne. "We talked about doing a project together with his music, and it seemed to make sense — two saxophone players who musically intersect with him, but in completely different ways. David's been around a lot longer than I have and is involved in a different area. I was, I suppose, a little surprised, both that he was interested and at the way he approached it. It didn't seem like he was at all uncomfortable. Talking to him I realised he wasn't just paying lip service to this music. In a sense he knew Julius's music a lot deeper than I did."

As well as devising strong casts of musical personalities to work with, Berne is interested in finding new ways of addressing the use of improvisation in written music. His recent, longer pieces tend to work with sequences of thematic blocks, within which often complicated ideas are worked through. He claims that he tries to bring something of the feel of improvisation to the notated sections.

"I guess I'm into both extremes. I'm really into juxtaposing this highly structured writing with complete insanity or chaos or whatever, and having the two things co-exist. I don't want to control the players, all those guys have so much to say on their instruments that I want to encourage."

He is knowledgeable and (therefore) highly cynical about the music business. He's worked in a record shop himself and he set up his own label to put out his first release in 1979. He arrived at his present label JMT when, after a stint with Soul Note, he was signed and then crazily dumped by Columbia, despite the warm reception accorded his work for the label.

He's clear what image he wants to put across when talking about his approach to live performance, asserting that unpredictability and danger are the only constants, and citing the addition of Django Bates to his regular band for the final UK dates of his recent European tour. "I like to do that," he says, "it's uncomfortable, it makes me nervous, but it always seems to help me develop and grow."

Continuing to develop the strong, independent composing voice he displayed on the recent piece commissioned by Birmingham Jazz (performed here in April) is the main preoccupation now, so much so that there are musicians in his field he won't listen to for fear of adulterating his ideas.

"Probably everything I listen to is outside of jazz. African music, groove music... Ligeti, Lutoslawski... I don't really listen to music for inspiration, but I know something like that'll spark ideas of ways to approach sound. At the same time I know I'm not going to copy it so it's not going to be dangerous for me to listen to it. With Julius it was always so hard for me to undo all that. It was such a strong influence. When I listen to his old records there's just no question of that to me and I'm not ashamed of it. I just heard his sound in my head for years. I had to get away from it and find my own space, even though I loved it."

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Orbital

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One of these days, someone will sit down to write a thesis about the vocabulary used to describe Techno music. And when it happens, there, alongside all the so-fi cyberpunk terms and the parallel terminology of ambience, transcendentalism and luvuuurve, they'll find a little space that has to do with maths and topology. It's here where Orbital live, alongside a Möbius loop and a lot of shapes.

Shapes — actually patterns and wave-forms forming and distorting in the electronic space of racked synthesizers and drum-machines — are central to the thinking of the Orbital brothers, Phil and Paul Hamon, a Techno House duo hailing originally from Kent.

The fluffy clouds that float through the ambient skies of much House music barely touch on their horizon ("Orbital live in a more ruthless world," they say). Their records — "Omni", "Chime", the *Radico* EP, a debut album in 1991, and now the follow up, released this month on FFRR's Internal subsidiary — have over the past three years provided British dance music with some of its brightest and fiercest lights.

Certainly much of the glow can be glimpsed during their frequent live (and they are live) and largely improvisatory shows. In concert, Orbital are louder than — say — Glenn Branca, and flyers for his electric guitar symphonies always carried volume-warnings. But short of sheer sensation, their rediscovery of the transformational capacity of sound and rhythm marks the duo as a thoughtful entity. Both albums feature tape loops — Orbital's sonic version of the Möbius — repeating the phrase "Time becomes a loop" over and over. The second is bookended with tracks influenced by Steve Reich's early phase-shifting exercises. It's as if, after all these years, popular electronic music is recapitulating minimalism's earliest roots.

There's no hype or attitude surrounding Orbital. Phil — the bald one with multi-eyebrows — talks of the trials of slotting family life into the schedule of a jobbing musician. Paul is still smarting from missing The Grid's perfor-

mance two nights previously, at their shared gig at London's itinerant Club Megadog. "They had a supporting video of geometric patterns," he says. "It was made by a studio that has some link to Spielberg... I was very interested in that."

One of the more endearing aspects of the brothers Orbital is that, unlike many bands, they have no clear manifesto to offer up, no towering world plan (instead they say, "Our music is all about loops and time and space..."). At rock bottom they have always been fans — of gay Hi-Nrg, Hip-hop electro, Euro-experimentalism, industrial dance crossover. When they first heard House music, the sequential loops reminded them of disco, and they'd drive out of their Home Counties base towards London so as to pick up Jazzie M's weekly House show on the (then prate) Kiss FM. It was Jazzie's fledgling label O Zone that released their first single "Chime" in 1990.

The success of "Chime" and their subsequent signing to FFRR meant the end of day-into-night jobs on building sites and in restaurant kitchens, but it hasn't altered the Hamon's pragmatic approach to their music. Foremost, they see themselves as workmen-musicians. "We're lucky — our hobby is now our work," Paul says.

The new album is, like its predecessor, untitled. Many of the ten tracks are given only the barest name tags: "Remind", "Impact", "Lush 3-1". The reason lies partly in their view that the two albums are separated only by time — and, like the Möbius strip, time loops about itself. They suggest that a titling act would be superfluous — revealing too much through language would somehow cloud the listener's responses.

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"Halcyon was something Paul did one Sunday afternoon. It reminded me of a dreamy Valium state," says Phil. "But our Mother was on Halcyon (a Valium-like tranquilizer)," says Paul. "She had been for about seven years. A lot's been written recently about its side-effects, madness. It turns people insane. The doctor was giving her double the recommended dosage. Halcyon was a nightmare for our adolescence." Phil continues: "It was a nightmare for her, too. I actually persuaded her to smoke dope to get back into a sleeping pattern." He shakes his head. "She — our Father — they were very suburban... it was quite a job." Outside, somewhere, a car backfires. Given the proximity of Orbital's studio to the bomb crater that is now Bishopsgate, everyone listens just a little harder to the sound and the shape of those that follow it.

LOUISE GRAY

Orbital tour the UK this month, alongside Aphex Twin and The Drum Club, as part of the Megadog/Mid Circus tour. See *Sounding Off* for details.

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“If you work as intensively and as independently as I do, then you can only do what makes you feel right. You follow a certain kind of musical argument, and try to achieve this. It doesn't always succeed in the way I wish, but more and more I feel that we have found our own direction, together with the musicians I have chosen to record for us. We want to do music which seems necessary to us, and which will not be done by bigger companies.”

Manfred Eicher launched ECM (Editions of Contemporary Music) in 1969, at a time when, in his own words, “it was still worth going to jazz festivals, because there still existed something called magic, and there was a public response to the music which was not pre-conceived by opinion leaders.” When he first met saxophonist Jan Garbarek in Bologna that year, the label did not yet exist, but he was looking for artists to record, and found in the Norwegian a “hymnic quality devoted to something which is real.”

This year sees the release of ECM's 500th album, Jan Garbarek's *Twelve Moons*, which was launched at an international press conference with Eicher (looking a little uncomfortable at the attention) and Garbarek in Zurich in April. The company had taken over the elegant Yaghoubi Gallery on the shores of Lake Zurich, looking away down the calm, placid waters to distant snow-capped peaks. The setting reminded Garbarek of Oslo, he confided afterwards, and seemed an appropriate setting in which to be celebrating this particular release, with its characteristically haunting, evocative soundscapes.

ECM began it, with a 500-disc pressing of Mal Waldron's austere trio session *Free At Last*. Paul Bley came in with ECM 1003, Jan Garbarek with ECM 1007, Chick Corea with ECM 1008, Keith Jarrett with ECM 1017, Ralph Towner with ECM 1025, Gary Burton with ECM 1030, Terje Rypdal with ECM 1031, Eberhard Weber with ECM 1042, and John Abercrombie with ECM 1047. ECM 1050 was Keith Jarrett's classic *Belonging*. Pat Metheny came on board with ECM 1073, Edward Vesala with ECM 1077, and Egberto Gismonti with ECM 1089. By then, the ECM approach was well established, with a distinctive musical philosophy (not that Manfred Eicher would necessarily see it this way) and visual style, and a roster of artists who not only sold records in significant quantities, but seemed to enjoy working with one another as well.

The roster continued to expand and — alleged uniformity notwithstanding — the label increasingly took the form of a Who's Who in contemporary jazz in all its richness. John Surman, Kenny Wheeler, Gary Peacock, Dave Holland, Colin Walcott, Jack DeJohnette, the Art Ensemble Of Chicago, Don Cherry, Nana Vasconcelos, Charlie Haden, Dewey Redman, Shankar, James Newton, Bill Friesell, Miroslav Vitous, Dino Saluzzi, Ennio Rava, Oregon, Masquarero, The Berlin Contemporary Jazz Orchestra, Jimmy Giffire, Hal Russell and Charles Lloyd. This list is far from exhausting the roster, however, because ECM have consistently used their returns on bigger-selling artists to record less obviously commercial talents — usually European — like Manus Stockhausen, Paul Giger, Sidsel Endresen and Hener Goebbels. The orientation of the catalogue has pushed beyond jazz, most dramatically with the launch of the New Series — “classical” recordings in-

When he was first looking for artists to record, Eicher heard in Garbarek's music a “hymnic quality devoted to something which is real.”

editions

The ECM label has been at the forefront of modern European music for almost a quarter of a century. Kenny Mathieson joined founder Manfred Eicher and early sax star Jan Garbarek in Zurich to celebrate the label's 500th record release, and heard their reactions to the success so far.



of the

COO |

cluding music by Steve Reich, Meredith Monk, John Adams, Gavin Bryars, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Arvo Part, as well as interpretations of Bach, Shostakovich, Hindemith, and Schnittke, and the "early music" of Perotin, Gesualdo and Tallis.

Looking back today, Garbarek recalls the tape of his group he offered to Eicher at that first meeting, and how this was not the deal the German wanted to strike. Instead Eicher offered to come to Oslo and record the band himself, a pledge which Garbarek took to be the "don't call us" variety. Several months later, however, with ECM now up and running from the small Munich office it has occupied ever since, Eicher made good his offer.

It was the beginning of a three-cornered association between artist, producer, and recording engineer Jan Erik Kongshaug at the Rainbow Studio in Oslo, which would be repeated with most of the label's new signings. Garbarek acknowledges the importance of Eicher's influence across a personal discography which now numbers 45 albums. "Manfred is very much involved in what is going on in the studio. He is not the kind of producer who would just say everything is fine all the time. He has strong opinions, and he goes intensely into the creation of the music, and has an amazing memory for really small details on a particular version of a tune. He can come up with really fruitful suggestions, and I am also grateful for the part he has played in setting up sessions with other musicians."

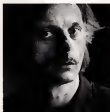
This description is not difficult to square with the mental picture of Eicher that has built up over the years. The physical and mental intensity with which he works is legendary, and his insistence on maintaining control of all aspects of the label's development has lessened only slightly with the passage of time (and the development of his interests in other areas, notably film). Even with this easing off, it remains very much his label.

"There is no such thing as an 'ECM sound'." We approach all our artists as individuals, but I think that different kinds of music which we have chosen to record have perhaps become a stream of music which has influenced other musicians. I think what we do is in the best possible way what we would like to hear, and I have spent a lot of time with musicians like Jan and Keith and Egberto and so on, just sharing our thoughts about music, and often very new, strong things would come out of those discussions."

The sheer sonic purity and clarity of ECM releases has certainly been at the heart of the label's appeal. It also elicited persistent criticism about its "coolness" or lack of emotion. Eicher is dismissive of such complaints, but does acknowledge his interest in silence, in the unsaid as well as the said, in "the pause which is changing the meaning of what is played." In the studio, however there is no attempt to impose a mandatory sound-world "dictated by Manfred Eicher and Jan Erik Kongshaug."

"Every musician who goes into the studio has to cross into this red-light district where everyone is intimidated by the microphones and the situation, but the studio is a meeting-place more than a kind of technological space full of digital equipment."

"It is not an iron element for me, and we record everyone differently, depending on what we want from the music. Of course, we need the best



Eicher: "I always have a hope that the music we produce will change something for the people who listen to it."

ECM—A Beginner's Guide

Keith Jarrett *Belonging* (ECM 1050)

The pianist, with quartet, as jazzman par excellence.

Jan Garbarek *Dis* (ECM 1093)

The saxophonist caught as he evolves towards his present stark melodic simplicity.

Art Ensemble Of Chicago *Urban Bushmen* (ECM 1211/2)

A rare live release for ECM, arguably the AEC's finest record.

Edward Vesala *Luma* (ECM 1339)

Percussionist/composer, one of the great European iconoclasts.

Hal Russell *NRG Ensemble*

The Finnish/Swiss Tour (ECM 1455)

Russell's dark ferocity blows away any preconceptions about the "ECM sound."

equipment and technology to make it possible, but the technology does not come in front of the music — we don't make music which is ideal for some particular kind of digital equipment."

It may be that those who remain resistant to the open spaces and pastoral shadings of ECM are simply unable to look into the perceptual mode which created this music in the first instance. Actually the catalogue has its share of rip-roaring, unbridled music-making, from early Garbarek through to the late Hal Russell, from the Art Ensemble to Björkenheim, but the kind of contemplative sound-world which is for so many listeners the very definition of ECM is that of the later, folk-saturated Garbarek, or Gismondi, or Townier, or Abercrombie. It's music which requires a different way of listening, compared to the up-front qualities we have become used to in most current music (much of which Eicher terms "environmental pollution"). Of course there are also ECM recordings which are simply dull. No one gets it right every time. Manfred Eicher's tastes being so very specific, perhaps only he could hope to like everything the label has put out over the years.

But ECM has been a major and formative force in contemporary music. Without question it is one of the most artistically important record labels currently in operation. This prominence has been achieved without compromise, what's more, it was achieved without ever setting out to make a big-selling record as such. Many independent labels have been bankrolled by a single chart-busting act, but even Eicher admits he cannot account for the extraordinary success of their banker, Keith Jarrett's flawed but magical *Köln Concert* (1975), which has now clocked up in excess of two million units, and still regularly tops the ECM sales lists. The range of music expands with the catalogue. Garbarek is as likely these days to work with folk singers (*Rosensble and Twelve Moons*) or Pakistani musicians (*Ragas And Sagas*) as anyone coming from any part of jazz. Maybe the future development of ECM will bring a less readily identifiable, ever more diverse aesthetic and image with it? Eicher remains cautious.

"I never think in terms of time — I just do it day by day. That is how we started, and I have no idea what the future will bring. My diary is full until October, and that is enough. I hope that we will continue to do as we have done, and maybe find even more refined ways to get rid of something which is not so interesting, and concentrate on finding new territories, and bringing together people who share this ideal of music-making."

"There are already many styles and approaches in the ECM catalogue, but I believe there is a line which connects them all. When I look back, it is almost like a retrospective biography for me. The New Series brought a very different element in, but I trained as a classical violinist when I was six years old, so that had already been in my life for a very long time."

"I don't really know what we will do next, or what will happen with music. If I knew that... I hope that it will not disappear, that's the first thing, because of so much technology interfering with natural sounds. Whatever happens, though, I always have a strong hope that the music we produce will change something for the people who listen to it." □

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invisible jukebox

JACO PASTORIUS/CHARLIE MINGUS/JONI MITCHELL
"The Dry Cleaner From Des Moines" from *Mingus* by Joni Mitchell (*Asylum*)

It's Jaco. Joni Mitchell. Is it a James Moody song? Oh, it's the *Mingus* album. Charles is definitely the biggest influence on me as musician, partly because he was a bass player, but also because he was a composer bass player. He was a very early fusion musician if you like because he fused country blues into jazz, and all of those things have stayed with me. The very first person I listened to was Percy Heath. When I was about 11 or 12 my father took me to see the MUQ at the St Andrew's Hall in Glasgow and even though I was sitting in the back row, Percy just had this fabulous tone and that turned me on to want to play the bass. Then I listened to Scotty La Faro, Charlie Haden, Ray Brown of course — the list is endless — Oscar Pettiford, Leroy Vinnegar, Jimmy Blanton. But when I became aware of Mingus it changed my whole life. It was his total approach as a band leader and a bass player and a composer that appealed to me, and really touched me.

And Jaco?

Jaco was a fabulous player, and he certainly made his mark on the bass, but he was a very tormented person. I spent a night playing with him in a little club in New York shortly before he died, and half way through the jam he just sort of said to me, "Oh, you've got to come with me," and I went outside with him and he just ran away. He just literally sprinted down the block and around the corner and I never saw him again — ever. At the end of his life he seemed to be going in all directions at once. He was kind of up for a second, then really down. There was no calmness there

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear.



jack bruce

tested by Philip Watson

He will only admit to it jokingly, but singer, bassist, composer and multi-instrumentalist Jack Bruce is a rock'n'roll legend. Recently inducted, with fellow Cream members Eric Clapton and Ginger Baker, into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Bruce has been making music for more than 30 years. He first came to attention in 1962 when he joined Alexis Korner's Blues Inc, quickly becoming an integral part of the 60s British R&B scene in bands led by Graham Bond, John Mayall and Manfred Mann, among others. But it was Cream that really propelled him into the stratosphere, the trio that (reportedly) sold 30 million

records in their three years together. Cream split because Bruce wanted to return more to his jazz and blues roots. Since 1969, he has explored these and other paths, including rock, latin and classical, and worked with Tony Williams, Carla Bley and Kip Hanrahan. He has also released several highly regarded albums — most recently *Somethin' Else* (CMP) which features Clapton, Dave Liebman and Dick Heckstall-Smith among others. This month he is touring with his regular trio of Blues Saraceno (g) and Simon Phillips (d) on dates which include a return to his home town of the Glasgow Jazz Festival.

at all. I can certainly relate to it, but it's very tragic that he didn't hang around any longer.

LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS
"Last Night Blues" from *Last Night Blues* (Prestige/Bluesville)
Should I know who this is? It sounds like Little Walter on harmonica, but it isn't him. Is it Sonny Terry? [It is.] But it's not Browne McGhee. No, you'll have to tell me it's Lightnin' Hopkins.

Oh God, yeah, but I don't know this at all. I consider myself lucky for recognising Sonny Terry. I wouldn't claim to be anything like an authority on blues music, but Lightnin' Hopkins — you can't really say anything about liking him or not, he just is. Any slight knowledge I have of the real blues, the country blues, was gained through Eric. I knew about Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, but Eric introduced me to people like Robert Johnson and Hopkins and Skip James. I think it's the reality of it that I liked. It's the link with Africa you could imagine that music almost unchanged played in West Africa a couple of hundred years ago. It's like a little hint back to where we all come from, because no matter what colour we are, we all come from there. Like a race memory, something that echoes in our souls, that exists in all music — like a common language. It has to be the basis of the music. I play — that search for the common thing, that something that cries out in the music. God, that's a bit philosophical. Let's move on before I get any worse.

LED ZEPPELIN
"Custard Pie" from *Physical Graffiti* (Swan Song)

Pah. Obviously I should know this. It's not Led Zeppelin is it? Why are you playing me session musicians? Do you want to listen to any more?

No. Oh, I'm only joking, but I never listened to them to be quite honest — it just didn't interest me. Funny enough I got asked to join that band. But I didn't — I don't know whether you noticed. I was more interested in the jazz-rock fusion thing, especially with Tony [Williams]. I'm not putting them down as musicians, and the lads have done well and everything, and it's not jealousy, but it's just the fact that their audience was created by us lot [Cream] and Jim, and we threw it away. I don't envy what happened to them — I've been through the rock and roll madness as much as I really want to. That was part of the reason why Cream came to an end, when it got really big, I soon stopped being interested in it. I thought it had got out of hand, so I went deliberately in the opposite direction and played small jazz clubs. But Robert Plant — what was it that Pete Brown said about him? Oh yes, he uses the wrong kind of ferretter.

PAUL CHAMBERS/JOHN COLTRANE
"Mr PC" from *Giant Steps* (Atlantic)

Coltrane. What can I say? Do you want to listen to this bass? Yeah. It's Paul Chambers on bass isn't it? Again a tragic much-too-short life. He was a wonderful player, but the thing about him was that he was so influenced by Coltrane and the approach he had to improving. I love great bass soloists, but that wasn't something I ever tried to emulate. I was more attracted to people like Mingus or Charlie Haden — the grooving approach as opposed to tremendous technique and soaking. To me the bass has always been more of a functional instrument — a catalyst really. But I always, obviously, loved Coltrane's playing. It's amazing to listen to him now. Coltrane changed the world for tenor players and his sound has become so much part of the language. Miles made some criticisms of Coltrane in his book, but I think Miles didn't like him because he didn't dress sharply enough. It was the same with Tony and Larry [Young] — Miles would tell his bands where to buy his clothes — it was a store called Parachute in New York — but, of

course, Miles wouldn't buy his clothes there — he went somewhere better. Do you think it's overstating the case to say Coltrane's music has a spiritual dimension to it? No, I think we all get that from Coltrane — that's what it's all about. And that's the great thing about jazz or blues. It's that link to what we are and where we come from. I don't know if I would put it any higher than that, otherwise it gets difficult to talk about. But certainly it's something that strikes a chord. And that incredible Ascension album he did towards the end, which was put down, but I love that. Although it's maybe a little more difficult to listen to, it's still very happening. Very happening.

JAHWOBELLE
"Visions of You" from *Rising Above Bedlam* (eastwest)
I've definitely no idea who this is. It's not Donovan. That's a joke. . . It's John Wobble. I actually should have recognised that old-fashioned bass sound, yeah. I know of him, and I've heard a couple of things by him, but he's not somebody I know much about. And it's Shinehead on vocals isn't it? I thought it might be. It's quite interesting really. I would have to listen to it more. I guess . . . erm, but it's not really my kind of thing. Let me play you another track ["Solidarity"]

It's sort of pleasant, but to me there's not a lot to listen to. It just sounds like back beats with reverb. It's almost New Agey, background stuff which I have problems with, I have to say. It's even like a lot of the straight music that they're pushing at the moment, like Tavener. I want to see his new opera the other day and it was kind of hypnotic, but I kept waiting for the music to happen. I like great rhythms and great melodies and shattering chords and Stravinsky and Messiaen — stuff that grabs you. Messiaen's music just has big chunks of sound — I love that — and it seems to have this very deep meaning in the way that Coltrane's music does. It's not like Beethoven where you get a theme and then 20 minutes of twiddly bits. I'm not trying to be controversial, but Beethoven only knew three chords

as well. I haven't heard this whole record obviously, but it has that feeling of mood music. And although there's a place for it, I would say it's probably the elevator

BOOTSY COLLINS
"Jungle Bass" from *Jungle Bass* (Island EP)
I don't know.

What if I was to say Parliament/Funkadelic? Oh God, I wish I'd said it now. It's Bootsy Collins. Again I've got links with Bootsy because I know George [Clinton] quite well and Bernie Worrell. Bootsy's great if only because his basses are better looking than anyone else's. He has that star-shaped one, remember? I like all this stuff, I mean I love it actually. There are probably better players than Bootsy technically, but he's solidly in the tradition of Larry Graham who really invented the slapping bass. I guess. There's a lot of humour in that whole area. That particular track didn't grab me, but this is the funk. . . the Real Funk.

JACQUELINE DU PRÉ
Elgar's Cello Concerto in E Minor, London Symphony Orchestra/Sir John Barbirolli (EMI Classics)

I know this. Give me a while. It's Jacqueline Du Pré — the Elgar. I've got chills — it's the sound, the tone. She had the most sublime sound. Tragedy [long pause]. Yeah. It's The Real Funk. I mean if you want to talk about spirituality, then it's right here in the same way it is with Coltrane. It's just a different way of approaching and achieving it. This must be the ultimate recorded performance of this piece and she very much made it her own. I was in love with her in the 60s, and followed her career, because I can't think of anyone that I know — even Casals and Fournier — with a more appealing cello sound, or more moving. I'm glad that recording exists. You seem genuinely moved listening to this piece. Yes. Initially by the sound, but then by her life. Although she was very brave and an inspiration to everyone, I still feel a loss.

BLIND IDIOT GOD
"Stravinsky/Blast Off" from *Blind Idiot God* (SSS)

I've never heard of Blind Idiot God. Although you might not think so, there's a classical link with the last piece that track's called "Stravinsky/Blast Off" [Laughing] Erm, yes . . . Stravinsky might have liked it, I don't know. I've nothing to say about it. But you like the guitar trio format. Yeah. The first jazz group I really liked was Ornette Coleman's trio, and the first jazz things I was involved in was just saxophone, bass and drums. So I keep returning to trios because there's a lot of freedom there — it tends to be more linear than harmonic which I like, and it gives you a lot of space to play. I'd have to listen to the whole thing, but it seemed deliberately undisciplined, which is fine. Cream were quite noisy at times weren't they? Yeah, very noisy. But if you listen to the records there was also a lot of delicate playing. Ginger can be a very sensitive, filigree, melodic player. There was a certain amount of crashing guitars, but there was also dynamics. Good name though — Blind Idiot God.

JIMI HENDRIX
"Come On (Part 1)" from *Electric Ladyland* (Polydor)

Well, what can I say? We all know who that was. Great. He was a great guy and I wish he was around now. Around the time of his death we were planning a band with Tony and myself, and I think it would have been pretty great if it happened. Like all creative people, he was always developing, but at the end of his life he was up against a brick wall. He seemed to want it to go towards playing with people more on his own level. I mean that with all the respect in the world to the people he played with, but they were very much background players. Jimi opened up the possibilities of the electric guitar, but he was raw wasn't he? A lot of things you've played have this spirituality in common — this depth and reality, whether it's Jacqueline Du Pré or Jimi Hendrix. They tap into something that is almost beyond human music. There are too many people in my musical life who I miss because they are no longer here. And Jimi is certainly one of them. □

great **loSt** recordings

In this month's extended edition of our regular feature on forgotten or neglected recordings, John Corbett states the case for committing improvised music to disc, and single-handedly rescues ten such documents from the brink of obscurity.

The very process of laying free music on tape is usually cast as the pale shadow of live performance. Recordings, it is maintained, are feeble attempts to stab at the fleeting moment, ill-suited investments in the indexing of the ephemeral, the culmination of the wrongheaded "documentary" impulse. But if we treat recorded improvisation as a separate sonic species altogether, it becomes a legit musical endeavour — even in the studio, without a stand-in audience. Here then is a brief registry of ten unsung improv greats that have been "lost" in the live vs recording scuffle (dates refer to the year of recording rather than release).



Radu Malfatti/Stephan Wittwer *Und?* (FMP 0470, 1977)

You choose: this or its companion *Thrumbln'* (FMP 0350), recorded a year earlier. Pre-thrash-metal-terror from Wittwer, one of the only free guitarists to specialize in solid-body (wisely Telecaster, sometimes miked rather than or in addition to being amplified). On "Cotpotok (Still Valid)" he also moans sinisterly. Both fantastic LPs, harsh in places while gorgeous elsewhere, they unfold rather slowly, lots of tone-matching and Malfatti's loopy mutes and minuscule aural flurries.

Tom Cora/David Moss *Cargo Cult Revival* (Rift5, 1982)

Unreal textures and palpable sounds here change very swiftly, ranging from Moss's baby monster voices, his bone-dry, mechanical and soaked percussion (and occasional computer games) to Cora's outrageously versatile and at times kalimboid cello — together, they suggest anything but obvious interaction. Last cut aptly describes this political music for molluscs: "Unipods Are Pacifists."



PHOTO: MICHAEL WHITE

Gunter
Christmann

Gunter Christmann/Torsten Müller/Davey Williams/LaDonna Smith
White Earth Sireak (trans museq 7, 1981)

Alabama-bound Williams (guitar) and Smith (vlna, violin, voice) in brilliant quartets with Nord-Deutsche's Müller (bass) and Christmann (trombone), recorded in Langenhagen, released in Birmingham ('Bama). Carnivorous, power-packed, dynamic, with delicate balance of voiced and unvoiced noises — Smith and Müller arco-mania, Christmann vocal grumbles, Williams before the Steinberger. Great collage cover by Dora Lee Rosen.

XPACT Frogman's View (*UHKlang 5, 1983*)

Erhard Hirt's part-time steel dobro is the timbral spoiler here, in a sadly-gone group with Wolfgang Fuchs, Paul Lytton (percussion) and Hans Schneider (bass). I played it for LaDonna Smith years ago and she exclaimed: "Extremely musical!" Lots of sudden sounds, interrupting luge-like guitar and repeated bass and guitar figures. Fuchs, as usual, is squeaky and brilliant.

Steve Beresford The Bath Of Surprise (*Piano 003, 1977-80*)

The chameleonic Beresford with many cuts, some overdubbed, touching plenty genres ("Leutenant Dub" a particularly lovely nod at The Good Soldier Sveik, using lotsa instruments in myriad ways. Eclecticism in its highest, most uninhibited and unformulaic form.

Evan Parker/Keith Rowe/Barry Guy/Eddie Prevost Supersession (*Matchless MR17, 1984*)

In concert, two-thirds of each AMM (Rowe, Prevost) and E. Parker Trio (Parker, Guy) conjoin to create this superior, short but concentrated (i.e. compact) disc. Around a third of the way into the lone cut, things reach one of numerous nail-biting peaks — Parker blowing high and mighty, Guy cruising the low hold, Rowe blazing crazed, Prevost rumbling underneath and popping top-shots. Rowe briefly shares the golden frequency with skittish Evan, minutes later, he and Guy are swapping electronic secrets. Miraculous, quixotic, edge-of-seat, freestyle improvisation.

Michihiro Sato/John Zorn Ganryu Island (*Yukon 2101, 1984*)

Best-ever Oriental/occidental improvised hoedown: Sato plucks ultra-spare, slow-mo shamisen while — very separately — Zorn bleats, gargles and burps up a blue burn. Perversely non-communicative. Sato persistently makes Zorn work for it on seven studio cuts. Fascination (a) rhythms

Tony Bevan/Greg Kingston/Matt Lewis Original Gravity (*Incus CD03, 1988*)

Never saw an ounce of press on this, but it is remarkable. In fact, I've turned several people on to improvised music with it. Bevan is a major new voice on the tenor, Kingston is utterly un-Derek like on guitar (not an easy task for the semi-acoustic stringman — Kingston flat-picks more linearly), and Lewis's vivid percussion combines slapstick honking toys and metallic objects. Ensembling, the trio mashes together with telepathic synchrony.

The Ferals Ruff (*Leo LR 138, 1986*)

Quartets with Hugh Davies's incredible contact-mixed scraping string-things, Phil Minton's frightening rasp and gulp, Roger Turner's teeny-weeny percussion t'n't, and Alan Tomlinson's steam engine trombone. Sounds dense and rich enough to be early Stockhausen but moving with such speed and intensity that they have to be something else.



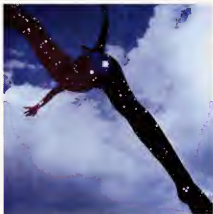
Paul Lovens

PHOTO: MICHAEL WHITE

Sven Ake-Johansson/Alex Schlippenbach etc. Idylle Und Katastrophen (*po torch ptr/jwd 6, 1979*)

Derek Bailey (guitar), Wolfgang Fuchs (reeds), Paul Lovens (percussion), Cadance Nating (violin), Gunter Christmann (trombone), Maarten (van Regteren) Altena (bass) team up with Schlip and Sven (the free music Slim and Slam) for larger-group improvised settings of Johansson's instant non-sequitur songs, crooned in multiple languages with voices from *sprechstimme* to cool McVouty. □

seen things





Sly sleeve sex down the decades (clockwise from top left): *Free, Free*; *The Winkies*; *Climax*; *The Ohio Players*; *Roxy Music*; *Roxy Music*; *Electric Ladyland*; *Jimi Hendrix*; *Suede*; "Good Gracious!", Lou Donaldson; *The New York Dolls*; *Too Much Too Soon*; *The New York Dolls*.

Piers Ford traces the phenomenon of the torch singer from its roots in turn-of-the-century Paris to its huge, shadowy influence on so much of today's smart pop, and ponders the links between sexual longing and high camp.

handing



PHOTO: BILLY BRYANT/REDFERNS

PHOTO: BOB WEIDENFELD/REDFERNS



to
on the

Icons of Torch, divas
past and present.
Left to right: Billie Holiday,
Judy Garland, Annie Lennox

rch



PHOTO: DAVID BEAL/EVERETT COLLECTION

In Jim Cartwright's recent tragicomic West End success *The Rise And Fall Of Little Voice*, the central character, Jane Horrocks's repressed, timid and damaged little voice of the title, can only express herself through the great pop divas, through extraordinarily accurate vocal impersonations — at home on her own — of their torch singing. When she at last discovers her own voice, in a denouement of profound comic poignancy, it is not the throbbing vibrato of a Judy Garland or a Shirley Bassey, or even the light entertainment wail of a Cilla Black, but a discordant, unmusical squawk. In a sense, she has no 'own' voice — the truth of her private emotions exists only in borrowed phrasing.

What is it about the torch song? What is the torch song? How did this particular species of music become the meeting point for so many lost hopes, unfulfilled desires and secretly broken hearts? And how did it come about that this style, which appears to have whispered so much to so many — in its evolution from Fanny Brice to Anne Lennox — is usually these days derided either as the preserve of a gay subculture or (more recently) as a by-product of the retro boom? Facetious reviewers will always dismiss a Shirley Bassey show as a glittering love-in for the gay fan, the worshipper at the altar of the camp heroine. And the notion that no gay man's record collection is complete without the entire works of Judy Garland is apparently the cliché that cannot die (never mind that many gay men simply find the Garland cult an embarrassment, *Friends* of Dorothy or no *Friends* of Dorothy).

On one hand, the torch song is a unique combination of vulnerability and stoical survival, of sexual despair and painful longing, these sirens of nightclub and airwave are a collective symbol of everyone's abiding fascination with sexuality and the rise and fall of relationships.

Nonetheless, the appearance of a female impersonator doing a very sincere Garland at last year's Royal Variety Performance is odd enough to need explanation (beyond such patronising treatments), almost a quarter of a century after her death? As is the use of a bizarre and somewhat cruel Piaf caricature to sell Heineken Export in a TV advert — however crude the conception and delivery, both these examples are evidence that camp cult provides a constant reference source for popular culture.

Consider Pam Gers's biographical play *Piaf* is scheduled for a (long overdue) revival later this year. Purists will no doubt be uneasy about the casting of Elaine Paige in the title role, but she is in fact one of the few good old-fashioned belters in British musical theatre with a strong following, and could well prove to be an inspired choice for the part. It's precisely the presence of torch singers in the great pool of popular culture which gives the image such force, the broader appeal (as represented by Paige?) beyond the narrow base of cult-fan worshippers exactly the means by which a mass of listeners are targetted one at a time — while the fact of this narrow but committed inner fan-base is testament not so much to the truth of the emotions being invoked, as to the precision of the targetting (the way any one listener sobbing into his/her drink knows it's his/her feelings being described, rather than just anyone's).

Take Whitney Houston. Never mind that it plumbed the worst excesses of overwrought power-ballad camp, her rendition of "I Will Always Love You" was a multi-million selling number one. Dolly Parton's original, simple little classic could hardly take the strain of Houston's ludicrous overkill. But it will always be "our tune" to a shy multitude of star-crossed, separated or broken-hearted lovers.

Neither Parton nor Houston are what ordinarily get called 'Torch', of course — but they do demonstrate how far its principles now reach. In particular, they confirm Jim Cartwright's intuition that the true torch singer doesn't quite inhabit herself, that — via the cover-version, the expropriation — a kind of *chan of impersonation* is in effect, from original to imitator, from imitator to individual audience member (another confirmation that

the torch-singing icon is a constant on the drag-act circuit.)

The sorely-buffed and tragic lives lived — it seems — by so many torch-singers have helped, for anyone forced by circumstance to live a secret, repressed or even vicarious existence, the torch singer becomes an ideal focus for identification. They embody love's capacity for sadness (surely the reason the torch singer has historically found her most enthusiastic and loyal audience in gay culture). And collectively, they make up the full catalogue of personal suffering — choose your own particular woe and empathise while they sing.

At her best, Judy Garland was a supreme torch singer. Listen no further than the soundtrack of *A Star Is Born* for a definitive version of "The Man That Got Away", as evocative a cry of sexual longing and the despair of desertion as there is. "I have a voice that hurts people where they think they want to be hurt. That's all", she told Dirk Bogarde (*Snakes And Ladders*, Chatto and Windus, 1978). With simple clarity, she probably summed up the secret weapon of torch. Indeed, the cult of Garland the diva centred at first not on the luminous film performances, nor the glowing legacy of her recordings, nor even on her Dorothy in *The Wizard Of Oz* (where most of us encounter her for the first time). It is a more macabre and distanced phenomenon, one which has only grown up since her death. In fact, by the time the Garland legend began to form, long after the cinematic triumphs and euphoric concerts, her voice was less than a shadow of its former self. Her ghoulish public weren't turning out to hear a golden echo of the past, but to see if each wavering vibrato would be her last. The adoring Garland fan is strictly a posthumous legend. Today we listen at a safe distance, to recordings which omit the raw embarrassment which was part and parcel of her actual performance towards the end of her life.



Edith Piaf: the link between the torch song and French chanson

Garland was in herself more than a simple torch singer. So were her predecessors, the now half-forgotten figures who brought the genre its first success — and meaning — in the 1920s.

Ruth Etting, Libby Holman or Helen Morgan are hardly household names today. But in the Jazz Age, and through the 1930s, they were at the pinnacle of American popular music, the singers of the great Broadway standards, the songs of Gershwin, Kern, Hammerstein and the like. All led lives which mirrored the plangently sad songs they specialized in. All were versatile performers who could turn their hand from cabaret to radio to film as required. Etting (1897-1978) was probably the most prolific recording artiste of her age. Even Fanny Brice (1891-1951), whose rendition of "My Man" is generally held to be the prototype for all the torch songs which followed, is probably better remembered as a Vaudeville comedienne and supporting film actress than as a singer. Listening to their plaintive laments today, it is easy to hear how far the torch song has come. Perhaps they were simply too rooted in their particular age to be re-invented as icons for subsequent generations in the way Garland or Billie Holiday would be (although resurgent interest in nostalgia-as-nostalgia means that their recordings are still accessible — Take Two Records' recent CD selection, *The First Torch Singers*, TT407, includes items from contemporaries like Sophie Tucker and Kate Smith).

In fact, "My Man" started life in 1920 as "Mon Homme", in the repertoire of the great French music hall star, Mistinguett (today it is probably better remembered as sung by Barbara Streisand in *Funny Girl*, the biopic of Brice's life). The link between the torch song and the *chanson réaliste* has remained strong down the years (stuck for a way of describing Edith Piaf to an English-speaking audience unfamiliar with her emotional technique and style, her recording company would often call her a "torch singer" in sleeve notes).

As well as the *chanson*, the torch song has strong echoes of several national musical cultures, Spanish flamenco, Argentine tango, the blues (many were convinced Libby Holman was black when they heard her perform "Moanin' Low" for the first time). All are popular musical art forms



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rooted deeply in human experience, but at the end it is the torch song — with its characteristic insistence on impersonation-as-tradition — which seems consistently to transcend nationality and class, sexual or even aesthetic preference.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, the old Broadway standards were revived and reworked by some of the great vocal stylists of the century: Peggy Lee, Holiday, Garland, Lena Horne, Julie London, Dinah Washington and Sarah Vaughan. Inevitably, the sophisticated jazz- and blues-inspired techniques of some of these artists carried the material a long way from its raw, vulgar, intimate roots and it developed in a variety of sophisticated, not to say self-conscious, directions. Now at the very heart of the Retro Boom, their recordings are being repackaged for a new generation, and singers like Lee and Holiday are giving torch material 'respectability', even though actual torch songs formed a very small part of their repertoires.

The torch song underwent a revival in the 1960s, but this was anticipated in revealing ways by the all-too-brief ascendancy of Patsy Cline. Country & Western is also fixated on unrequited love, the errant lover, separation, and Cline's own tragic life and early death (in 1963) have boosted her re-incarnation as a pop diva (with a dissident cult following — this time strongly lesbian). The chain here, which includes Tammy Wynette and Dolly Parton, concludes with k.d. lang, whose voice has the Cline vibrancy. Already an icon of sorts, lang eludes easy categorisation, but 'torch' is a word some critics have already reached for.

A wave of extravagant ballads climaxing with the songs of Bacharach and David — "Anyone Who Had a Heart" or "Walk On By" — helped the top singing stars of the 1960s (Helen Shapiro, Brenda Lee, Connie Francis, Sandie Shaw, Cilla Black, Dionne Warwick, Dusty Springfield) achieve their highest sales.

Another 60s survivor, Diana Ross, has long left behind the girl-group pop sound of her Supremes days for a career as a loud, glitzy, sentimental diva. But Springfield, a great pop diva and a great white soul voice (with a gay male and lesbian following), has linked up with the Pet Shop Boys recently. Beyond her simple survival, the welcome comeback of those panda eyes and pleading gestures, this move underscores something important to 40s and 50s torch, which the mid-60s wave escaped: self-consciousness.

Robyn Archer's seminal early 1980s one-woman show *A Star Is Torn* presented a feminist version of this self-consciousness, a politicized interpretation of the lives of several pop divas which remains one of the few attempts to dig beneath the stereotypes. But the notion has penetrated deep into intelligent or cult pop — those stars who are themselves their own subject (an idea that begins with Bowie, or perhaps Jacques Brel) have begun to explore the diva-role as an extension of the self-as-star-as-subject. While much of Annie Lennox's work deals with the difficult relationship which the icon must conduct with her following, the age-old torch themes of isolation and personal loss are always present. And even she couldn't resist a retro touch with her authentic, throw-away version of "Keep Young And Beautiful".

Less well-received was Sinéad O'Connor's introspective treatment of several classic torch songs: as if — paradoxically — by treating the songs seriously, she had failed to treat camp with the seriousness it somehow demands. Her stident originality as a persona — she isn't impersonating anyone! — intimidated her potential mass audience even as she refused to kowtow to the standard requirements of this or that cult clique.

Which perhaps goes to reaffirm the original point: that the true torch singer is defined by a capacity to touch us, regardless of sexuality or age, and that camp is a disguise for deep, shared, ordinary emotions, the kind we all experience, but may be too sophisticated to admit. As soon as we ignore such facts, or undervalue the music that lives by them, we begin to miss something of enormous importance. Something even Whitney Houston knows. □



Dusty Springfield
in the 60s: panda
eyes and pleading
gestures



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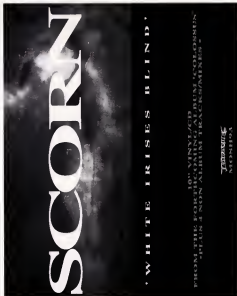
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Voguing at The Jungle:

"Gay people go out to have a good time. It's based on sociability rather than the power trip."

underworlds

David Lubich looks to New York's gay community to uncover the roots of House, the blackest, most soulful of today's dance grooves, and talks to House pioneers in America and Britain about the interface of gay culture and clubland.

It's the weirdest thing. We all think we know what Black music is, and how it reaches. Rap's massive success is built on simultaneously alienating and attracting white kids to the underside of black urban life, dancehall reggae makes big bucks off the craze for brutal, misogynist and hateful "slack" lyrics. Yet somehow in all this it seems to have been forgotten that the blackest music of all, the real soul music, comes from a place that Public Enemy and Banxu Banton would rather didn't exist.

New York's Roxy, late every other Saturday night, and up to 7,000 black and hispanic men gather in this vast club on the edge of Chelsea, now a gay quarter as infamous as the city's West Village, to dance to the music that pioneering House DJ Frankie Knuckles plays.

This being Manhattan, Knuckles last year faced real problems in bringing such a night to a venue hardly famed for its peaceful get-togethers, he smiles knowingly as he describes the reaction of the club's owner to the clientele. "He's worried about a black or hispanic crowd, because of the serious problems he's had with rap nights. He can't appreciate that a straight crowd is completely different from a gay one. Gay people go out to have a good time — it's based around sociability rather than the power trip." (A 'straight' crowd here means a rap crowd, that's how simple things appear to be in NYC.)

Looking down at the dancefloor through British sensibilities, there's no getting away from just how strange the scene seems: the atmosphere is intense, sweaty, but still vastly friendly. It's also totally gay and totally black. Perhaps it's easy to be biased about this, but that's missing the point — House music exists, as disco did before it, as the purest of soul music for people who want to hear songs of love, hope and belonging. Which may sound corny, but is no less true for that. Knuckles puts it more succinctly

"What makes most gay clubs so successful, and has made this music so successful, is that this audience is looking for escapism. Rap sells to white kids who can learn about black life and culture. The gay crowd doesn't need to be told about the tough life — they live it every day."

There are a few clubs — Knuckles's recent Friday residency at The Sound Factory Bar is one — which have managed to integrate black and white, but they're a rarity. Why? Knuckles looks at me like I'm an idiot. "That's the nature of New York, the nature of the US." The next morning, the papers are full of the story of a young black man, viciously beaten, for no apparent reason, by four white kids on his own housing estate, no one has been caught. Over in Brooklyn, Hasidic Jews are protesting at the 'Not Guilty' verdict against a black youth accused of the murder of a Rabbinical student. You begin to understand what he's on about. America — always a highly segregated society — is currently awash with dangerously high racial tensions.

Can it always have been this way? Knuckles smiles as he remembers the mid-70s, the good old days. "The first club I ever went to was The Loft (David Mancuso's now-legendary private party). The first time I went there I wasn't sure what kind of crowd it was at times it looked very straight, at others, very gay — at that point, sexuality didn't mean a thing." While Knuckles was DJing at Manhattan's legendary Better Days shortly after this, playing Philly soul to a predominantly black crowd, Tom Moulton was introducing a white audience to the sounds and potential of soul music, through his pioneering disco mixing at The Sandpiper on Fire Island.

Then, as always, the disco underground was black, soulful and very separate from the (huge) commercial disco mainstream: take a track like Betty Wright's anthemic "If You Love Me Like You Say You Love Me", with its combination of diva-like vocal and an unbelievably loud crashing tambourine sound; it could generate an intensity that would have been unimaginable to a straight audience. And remember, this was at the peak of the

apart

"Rap has taught white kids that they need to respect black people; with House, white kids and straight kids may embrace it, but unless they're able to respect gay people in the same way, what are we going to be left with?"

commercial disco explosion, when all the world was supposedly dancing to the same music. Frankie Knuckles makes the point explicitly. "The underground was not affected by the mainstream — we were dancing to completely different records. The scenes only converged very occasionally, and on our terms, when a major disco artist needed a big launch at a more exclusive disco."

Back in the UK, Ian Levine, father figure of the British mainstream gay disco scene, is currently having a fine time, riding high on recent chart success, even if it does seem strange that a man who has for 15 years been championing the cause of "real" disco music should end up producing the likes of Take That (or involving himself with the creepy, soul-by-numbers game-plan of The P-Model). It only begins to make sense when you realise that, for Ian, House music now has no connection at all with disco, or with British gay culture. In America, it's a gay, black thing — here, almost exactly the opposite.

It wasn't always so. "I remember being told off for playing House at Heaven in 1986. A very few hip people were into it, but the vast majority didn't understand it. I'd just come back from the US, and had seen Darryl Pandy performing 'Love Can't Turn Around'. It was amazing: he stood there like a male Pat LaBelle — an outrageous diva and a wonderful soulful vocalist." To Levine, this meeting of performance, soaring vocals and a song that was saying something gave the early House records a hook into the disco past. And the song itself, like so many others of that era, was somewhere between a cover and a rip-off of a cut disco track — in this case, Isaac Hayes's "I Can't Turn Around". Levine soon became disillusioned with the music, however. "By 1988 it had become all beat and no song, it lost it all," he says. He concedes that artists such as Joey Negro, whose "Get Into Your Fantasy" was one of 1992's classics, have brought disco sensibilities, orchestration and rhythms back into House, but his hostility to this music as it exists today remains.

So what did House bring to the British gay scene? "Look, House in Britain was never a gay thing, it was a straight white thing. It was the Pete Townshend of this world who broke it here, and it quickly became very straight macho thing to be into House music." Having dismissed the trendy soulboy brigade, he pauses. "By this time (1987 — a mere six months after it started), the music had forgotten where it came from."

But this isn't quite the truth — or it's only a very selective part of it. "The truth is," one long-time white scene member told me, "the gay scene up until about five years ago was racist, very racist. If anyone tells you that House wasn't gay, they mean it wasn't big with the white middle class clones who were into the Eurobeat stuff that Ian Levine was playing."

Omnipresent club promoter and entrepreneur Patrick Lilley agrees, and points to a link stretching back right to the legendary (or if you like, desperately obscure) London club Lift, launched in the same year that disco was supposed to have died, 1980. "It wasn't defined as a gay disco, although it was predominantly black and gay. The music wasn't quite there, but the vibe — the energy of screaming black queens — was very much *à la* New York," he says. This mightn't have been on a New York scale — it pulled a few hundred people a week — but it lasted for four years, and led on to the famous Jungle and Bad one-nighters.

"To us, Pyramid was the freaks' night," Ian Levine grins, remembering Heaven in 1987. Certainly, this one-nighter during Ian's reign at the London club, bore little relation to the other six nights, either in music or clientele. Mark Moore (later of S'Express) DJ'd the night, and for a DJ who'd made his name playing a mixture of disco trash, film soundtracks, and heavy

rap to the cosmopolitan B-Boys, trendies and suburban girls and boys Up West who flocked to the Wag Club, his presence at the UK's first House night was bound to attract a strange mix. How strange, nobody could have guessed. "It was a fairly white gay crowd — probably 70% — but along with that you got the B-Boys from the Mud.LL Cool J came down once, and had a great time," Mark recalls. "In fact, the only black faces were those B-Boys, Kid Batcher (subsequently of Bang The Party and Warriors Dance) would be down there every week, and every week he'd ask me 'why aren't there more black people here?' Despite this mix of two totally different groups, there was never a hint of trouble. "The B-Boys knew they were on someone else's territory — this was the first gay club they'd ever been to. And when the best known B-Boys in London — people like Magic and Flash — told their mates that it was OK, I think it helped to change peoples attitudes to the music, and to gay people as well."

Mark sees those early trendy House nights as proof that the scene could incorporate black and white, gay and straight, but also as proof that there was a white gay establishment that had either no interest in (or an active hostility towards) this new music. "Me and Colin (Faver, his collaborator at Heaven) were definitely fighting the rest of the gay scene," says Mark, who recalls trying in vain to convince Record Cellar, then the trendiest gay disco shop in London, to stock a record by Liz Torres. "I tried to tell them that this was the sort of music they should be selling, but they just couldn't understand — there was no point of contact."

But why did it take black gay Britons so long to support a music that their American brothers had never stopped championing? "I think that rights like The Jungle helped black men to come out, The Jungle worked because it was mixed. Guys could go and pretend they were straight. You got these little posers from South London, groups of guys and girls who looked like they were couples — but they weren't. The girls were their cover."

But it was The Trip, Nicky Holloway's huge House night at The Astoria in the late 80s, that really broke the scene among a black crowd. And here, as in any story about music, drugs have their part to play, there are any number of tales of B-Boys dropping a few Es at The Trip, swapping their gold chains for Smiley T-shirts and becoming House addicts overnight. As Mark points out, the main drag in London was "spiff, which gears you towards slower beats, rap and rare groove. With E, that all changed."

And now? London's Ministry of Sound attracts a mix of gay and straight, black and white, that you'd be hard pressed to find in the States. Queer Nation is just one of a growing number of such nights, increasingly run by black gay groups. The music has come home.

What didn't change, and perhaps never will change, is the gap between rap and House, the antipathy that exists between these two forms of true soul music. While the UK is seeing the gay scene become more integrated, and clubs such as Ministry of Sound attract gay and straight, black and white, things are very different Stateside. According to Frankie Knuckles, this goes to the core of attitudes towards gays, especially among the black community. "The fact that House got started in the gay clubs makes it tough for some of them to deal with it. Many people have a problem admitting what House music is." This is much more than a question of musical taste, for Knuckles, it goes to the core of the future that minority groups have to look forward to in the US. And, ironically, it's rap, with all of its violence, and too-frequent lapses into intolerance and homophobia that has helped to push things along. "Rap has taught white kids that they need to respect black people, with House, white kids and straight kids may embrace it, but unless they're able to respect gay people in the same way, what are we going to be left with?" □

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black saint,

Marvin Gaye stormed the charts with adult music that was a seething mix of sexual tension and tortured spirituality. Karen Bennett swoons and simmers as she explores the legacy of the greatest loverman of them all.

discussing sex simply as an element in the music of Marvin Gaye is like talking about the E string's relation to the bass. It's integral, without it, the bass is not the bass, the centre would not hold. And so with Gaye's music — sex, sexuality, erotic love was the centre, a given, a theme continually reformed from a myriad of perspectives. It was explored, celebrated, begged for, disdained, it was a vehicle of trust, distrust, tenderness, abuse, obsession. Gaye's voice made him a star, but this subject, which he returned to so often, added a dimension to his stardom — that of sex symbol

soul sinner





**Gaye dealt with sex
in all its variables:
mystique, romance,
freakishness,
ambivalence.**

Marvin didn't just sing about sex, he acted it out in performance, wooing ladies in performance, tossing them sweat-soaked handkerchiefs, employing scantily-clad dancers, even dropping his pants on-stage. Beyond that, many of his love/sex songs were directed to specific women — he mentions Janis Hunter by name on one album while his very high-profile marriage to and divorce from Anna Gordy was documented on *Here, My Dear*. Proceeds from its sale were the divorce settlement. People knew he was singing from real life.

In the tortured life of Marvin Gaye, things fell apart often and inexorably. Divorce, betrayal (real or imagined), drug abuse, drug-induced paranoia, attempted suicide and guilt over his own deathwish were all way-stations on the harrowing journey that culminated in his shocking death, at the hands of his father, on 1 April 1984. This event gave rise to widespread media chronicling of his private life, which revealed a pattern of abuse by his father being countered by the unequivocal and devoted love of his mother. The antagonism and tension inherent in this situation were played out right to the end. You don't have to read too far between the lines to spot a classic Oedipal conflict, which, unresolved as it evidently remained, made it inevitable that Marvin Gaye would have a hellish time with women.

In his detailed and sensitive psychoanalysis and biography of Gaye, *Divided Soul*, writer David Ritz refers repeatedly to the singer's unrequited need for approval and his perpetual self-doubt, both professional and sexual (Ritz is in fact credited on the sleeve of 1982's *Midnight Love* for giving Gaye the idea for the title "Sexual Healing"). In Ritz's book, each major era of Gaye's life and career is set in relief against a dynamic map of his psychological terrain, a formidable undertaking.

This article has a narrower focus — the different ways in which Gaye presented and treated sex in his music: artistically, through his use of tone, lyrics, rhythm, vocal tracking, and humanity, with sex in all its variety running the spectrum from joy to pain, from obscenity to spirituality, often all at once. He posed a telling rhetorical question in "Heavy Love Affair" (from *In Our Lifetime*, 1981): "What are these strange emotions? Loving the pleasure sweetly, loving the pain as deeply." Sex, in short, is a paradox. More than anything this is the matter of Marvin Gaye's song — and on this matter, more than anyone else, he sang the truth.

*"Put your face right here/Start to eat...
you hate yourself/you selfish little bitch...
if you do it right/you'll get the pipe...
Bitch, are you coming?"*
— from "Masochistic Beauty"

He started singing in church as a young boy, and despite the fact that his own father, a self-styled preacher, beat him unmercifully and withheld paternal love, he also taught Gaye about Jesus, love and mercy. The Lord became a kinder, gentler Father to whom Gaye professed his love and thanks on numerous album covers and in song, and as such surfaces in the middle of several of Gaye's more sexual tunes. Consider "Sanctified Lady" (from *Dream of A Lifetime*, 1985) in which Marvin catalogues various sexual practices, then declares he needs a "sanctified pussy", "A good ole church girl" who's "love-wet" and who says "I'm savin' mine for Jesus". At which point, the background vocal chorus, which has been repeating "sanctified" throughout the tune, intones "Jesus". On the same album (released posthumously) the song "Masochistic Beauty" appears, some of the lyrics are quoted above. The song is spoken in a sinister, monotonal mock-British accent, several times the speaker refers to the woman as a whore. The madonna/whore complex screams from "Sanctified Lady". It is enhanced by the incongruity of hearing a church-type chorus chanting "sanctified" while Marvin sings things like, "some girls suck/some don't care/some girls

fuck/some don't dare." He later adds wearily, "I'm so tired of livin'." The very use of profanity in the song undercuts its message, we are set up to hear the irony. "Masochistic Beauty", on the other hand, is one-dimensional — the flat voice, the fake accent and repetitive rhythm track become boring, there is no melody. The words are intended to shock, but almost as shocking is the amateurishness and tastelessness of this cut. The lusty church girl, by contrast, is interesting, the whole is a bore.

This juxtaposition of physical and divine love surfaced earlier in Gaye's work in much more subtle ways. Let's Get It On (1973) featured both the title track and the cut "Keep Gettin' It On", an obvious variation on the theme. In the first Marvin lays out his famous seduction argument: "there's nothing wrong with me/loving you — giving yourself to me could never be wrong/if the love is true." Bolstered by, "Do you know the meaning of being sanctified?" On the second, he extends the argument to invoke a more universal love, making love is presented as an appetite alternative to making war. Gaye urges people to "think about your good now/about the good that's in ya/ Just bring it on you/Who cho waitin' for?" Then he invokes God: "Oh Jesus, I'm tryin' to tell the people to come on and get it on/Yes, Lord!" As if he were clarifying his more noble intentions to the Almighty for this particular track, Gaye's vocal timbre has changed — it is harsher and more didactic. The reverse psychology of the gigolo ("I don't gonna push/No pushin', baby") is abandoned, and in his place stands a preacher with a message. But as Gaye shifts shape, it's suddenly clear that it's the role of chameleon that Gaye really uses so effectively throughout his work. He adopts a Dracula-type persona through the vocal effect on "Masochistic Beauty", as if to disassociate himself (and the identifiable sound of Marvin Gaye) from his baser instincts in what is certainly one of his crudest and least musical tunes. But he is supplicant rather than dominator on "Til Tomorrow" (from *Midnight Love*) — on the spoken prelude to the song, as the woman is (presumably) getting out of his bed, he pours it on, by any means necessary: "Oh don't go just yet, Baby/Tu étais incroyable... Oh Baby, don't go right now/I can't stand it please/I love you Baby, I love you so much."

Supplication and cajolery is heard right through Gaye's amorous repertoire. "Baby, I think I'm coposing [the waves are rising and rising]," he calls on the celebrated "Sexual Healing" (also from *Midnight Love*), a tune made all the more memorable and light-hearted by its reggae backbeat. But it's the prescriptive little addition which bolsters his plaint: "and it's good for us". This particular habit, so transparent as a lure and yet so human in its compulsion to rationalize, becomes more ingratiating (or anyway less annoying) the more one spots it. You're being badgered with simplistic reasoning: Who wants to make war when making love is the option? Who wants to wake up alone when "good experienced company" is the option? The aim of these various propositions could be summed up as "Just say yes." As "Sexual Healing" fades, we hear the final plea: "Please don't procrastinate/it's not good to masturbate;" an audaciously clever deployment of what was surely a nagging church taboo. (The nuns at my school certainly made a point of it.)

"You know real soon, baby/I'll be stroking you
In and out, up and down, all around —
I love to hear you make those sounds."
— from "Feel All My Love Inside"

But of course the most sustained, extraordinary anthem to erotic love is the seamless I Want You album (1976), wherein every element is marshalled to the seductive effect. The dense percussion, the echoing synth and the multi-tracked vocals give this music an almost palpable texture, weaving a spell that is enhanced by the repetition of both the title track and "After The Dance". Vocal and instrumental arrangements of each are

heard, and the restatement of the theme drives the point home masterfully. In addition, the layered effect (achieved through overdubbing) affords the singer the equivalent in music to a subliminal cut in film. He is able to suggest things that would have caused a furore at the time if heard outright. For example, Ritz maintains that Marvin was indeed singing, "I'm gonna give you some head" in "Soon I'll Be Loving You Again" (which for some reason he repeatedly — tellingly? — calls "Soon I'll Be Leaving You"). This detail, not readily audible, was actually brought to my notice some time before I read *Divided Soul* (a member of the vocal group The Five Starsteps, who reportedly sang backup with Marvin's band on the road, told a musician friend of mine, who told me). Once the line is identified, however, it is eminently clear, and it also gets repeated. In addition, other statements are also disguised by the layered vocal track. Unless my aural sense has become totally perverted during this endeavor, after much careful listening, I heard in the aforementioned tune: "I can't wait to touch you/Give you that feeling/Hit you with my dick/So your mood will be revealing." And there's more, purportedly, in fact everyone seems to have a theory about what he's saying here and elsewhere. The fact that it's so well disguised is what makes it intriguing, and adds to the overall mystique.

But the overdubbing also helps to create an enveloping effect, tantamount to having different sweet things whispered in each ear simultaneously. Gaye sings the sex act on "Feel All My Love Inside", replete with female moans (which surface on other tracks as well). But these are mostly superfluous, given the intensity and cohesion of the production. Mention the I Want You album to people of a certain generation and their eyes simply glaze over. As Gaye says (in "Come Live With Me, Angel"): "Just you and me/locked up for days", and that's what happened all over when this LP was released.

"Sometimes I hate your guts/And love your nuts
Sometimes I love your guts/And hate your nuts."
— from "Heavy Love Affair"

In spite of it all, Gaye's material is tame compared to what's going on in rap today, particularly underground rap. But we are talking not only about two different genres of music, but about two vastly different approaches to the sexual gestalt. Marvin Gaye set precedents, he was the groundbreaker. This is not to suggest that he is responsible for what came after the likes of Madonna performing lascivious acts while a crucifix dangles between her breasts. Gaye's interfacing of religion and sex entailed both history and complexity — the history and complexity of his own life, with all its contradictions. Moreover, he dealt with the subject of sex in terms of its variables: anticipation, mystique, freakishness, romance, ambivalence. And his sex songs are sexy.

Other cronies carried the torch, of course — Harold Melvin, Barry White, Teddy Pendergrass, Alexander O'Neal — a host of talented heaves. But who among them ever went so far or said so much, or so perilously trod the thin line between love and hate? As Gaye did? Who, for that matter, would have cast a tune called "You Sure Love To Bail" as a sultry groove rather than an unadorned funk jam? Who could have dropped the following analogy on a tune about sexual endurance? "Musics been my therapy/taken the pain from all my anatomy... I'd go crazy/if something ever happened to my musical thrill/AND DARLING, YOUR LOVE IS JUST LIKE MUSIC" ("Turn On Some Music" from *Midnight Love*). I could cite examples endlessly, but you get the idea.

Marvin Gaye's music epitomized the axiom "in art as in life" sex is multi-dimensional, and Gaye dealt with all its facets, brilliantly. □

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totally

grrr

Ever since I saw Huggy Bear bring *The Word* to a scrappy halt I haven't been able to shake them from my mind. I read all the articles — the backlash and talk-up and reader inquisition, the pro- and anti-factions. I wanted to write about this buzz on the edges of my brain, but why? And what? Maybe I shouldn't — wouldn't it be just another instance of the white adult male co-opting someone else's risky story? But maybe this was precisely what was niggling me: Huggy Bear seemed to be insisting that what they said/did was only meant for certain people. But what is exciting about them is that what they can or might do is founded on the possibility that it WON'T reach its 'correct' destination, that anyone can listen to anything, and do with it what they will, and that it is just this mismatch between intention and reception that makes art or pop or communication possible.

Ian Penman watches Huggy Bear being bad on TV, and compares the irritant gestures and radical gender-demands of Riot Grrrl with those of earlier anti-music movements.





Nicky: an interruption
inside the
media, not outside it

ered

The structures the Riot Grrrl movement promises (fanzine networks for disaffected girls, autonomous distributions, "grrl positive" info nets, new forms of "boy-grrl" musical interplay) are potentially thrilling, but as Lydia Lunch said, when asked about it by the NME: "It reminds me of 77 revisited. [BUT] the music is irrelevant — as a matter of fact it's pretty sucky, so why are they even using music? Get rid of the fucking raunchy bad rock'n'roll! That's where girls should wake up instead of trying to cop sound third generation rock'n'roll ricks that were terrible in the first place."

Riot Grrrl's importance lies in its effect upon a domain it affects to de-speak (the media), not in musical effectivity. But who precisely is it addressing? As Angela Carter once said: "Turning yourself into a slogan is, in the first place, a confrontational thing to do. Then comes the problem of the nature of the slogan, and who reads it." Riot Grrrl's main chance therefore is in what we used to call "interventions."

Which brings us back to Huggy Bear on a tacky teen show, playing their latest single "Her Jazz" so far, so formal — no great cat/calls to deconstruction here. Only later, when the group and assorted friends began to loudly heckle — whether they were hecking unbearable presenter, or unbearable item, or just unbearable everything-in-general/nothing-in-particular is not important — do we get the fleet sense of imputation, of unscripted noise, the passing semblance of uncontrollable passion that caught the breath, brought tears to this old-post-structuralist punk's eyes.

Alight, so they were maybe only storming barricades made of jelly, but it still felt like some kind of electrical storm, and indicative of what seems to me to be the presiding paradox of all Grrrl action so far: for a determinedly anti-media movement, they work at their best — maybe only work at all — as a media moment; an imputation INSIDE the media, not outside it.

Of course, they're not the first US all-girl Grunge metal group. L7 concluded an earlier Word-performance in general mayhem, including dropped trousers, exposed sex. Again, it sounds minor, but in the witnessing it held much of the same excitement(s) as the Huggy intrusion, it may have been little more than gross incivility (or indecency), but in a rock world in which such acts had apparently become impossible (because codified, scripted, rote — see Grrl Marcus, *The Wre 109*) it caused you to think again: it had real teen spirit, and if that meant DUMB teen spirit then so be it, because it still had some kind of fuck-you spirit all the same.

Can it signify anything beyond mindless fun? Maybe, because what such things did was UNsmooth the fabric, mess up *The Word's* slick presentation of Youth Culture. Despite its aspirations to cool controversy and kitsch mayhem (most of it on an unutterably meek and trivial level), *The Word's* just another misguided hip-producer's dream of tying up every last shred and thread of Youth Cult into one neatly knotted, smoothly fabricated and functioning package. The moments when this went wrong were all moments which punctured the flow, where groups (all 'outsiders' to this perky party) grudgingly or slothfully or crabby coughed up their own



excess to scrawl out over the smooth TV sheen. It dissolves, in one swipe, the old dream of one rock'n'roll — one song, one style that "we" might all agree on, align ourselves with, tune into, turn into.

And what was Huggy Bear doing, after all? Who hasn't sat at home and shrieked at the TV set with its passing parade of smug morons and banal bimboes? I often sit and watch and say to my partner, "Well, if I hate it and I'm in my thirties, what must THEY think?" But THEY (the "youth" audience) just passively plug along to the beat of *The Word* and do nothing. That is why Huggy's screams seemed to detonate the whole thing — no specific person or item, but the whole constellation of "youth" as a very limited set of surfaces, divisions, signals, alienations, aspirations. The shrieks woke you up because they reminded you what disavowed sounds like: "How CAN you take this?"

What HB make (in their own words) "troublesome and explicit" is that things don't function that way any longer, despite the belated Rock Dreams of boy revolutionaries in the rock press (and radio controllers, and TV producers). That assumed "we" is a lie, a prop, a phantasm. HB propose a different "we" with their shouts — which were maybe more thrilling than their music. By speaking up — and speaking across the conventions imposed and duly accepted by all and sundry, by refusing to be co-opted into any false notion of common bonhomie, they show it all up for the exhausted con it is.

Controversy of quite another kind goes even further towards proving this point. In a *Word* item on Ragga, a visiting Shabba Ranks was asked for a brief comment on Buju Banton (whose song "Boom Bye Bye" aims guns at gays). To everyone's obvious shock, far from providing a pat condemnation, Shabba cited the Bible as authority against the "unnatural" practices of gays and suggested that Cruicifixion was too good for them. And the outrage raged through the media world.

Which only proved that what we take to be immutably so (all "youth" music is linked, globally, in some kind of basic liberation theology, a "community" of youth culture that believes the same things, promises the same liberations) is no longer the case. This is what doom-laden preachers of the Rock is Dead line get so wrong. The imagined premises of Rock/Pop significance may be "dead" (whatever that word really signifies) but in material terms there is more youth culture, in more places, than ever before. It just exists in a state of utter fragmentation, dissolution, unconnectedness (and "sex" is just one of those areas where everyone at the party agrees to disagree).

If Huggy Bear embody this fragmentation, however, they are also prey to their own set of misapprehensions. They are much given to moaning about media misrepresentation — but what is there in media but misrepresentation? Representation IS a misappropriation, a fake, a simulacrum. (I think they know this, and sometimes choose to conveniently forget it.) It's as though they keep hinting at some basic punantical Huggy Truth which, once revealed, would — like some Biblical text written in light — set us all externally straight, blind us with its scrupulous energies.

The way they talk, they are stood off over here somewhere, in a cul-de-sac called Truth (and Girl Justice), and over there, somewhere else (the plane of plain speaking) is all that other stuff, rock music, the Indie scene with its smug little boy bands, MANipulating media sharks. Huggy, if hugely immodest, are also marked by a curiously precious and antiquated fear of modernity. It's like 5 Go Crazy on Speed and Ideology, an Us vs Them discourse which can be very childish.

On the other hand, the whole thing could be one massive wind-up. For that is what they come across as half the time — malicious mischief-making (kids. It's already there upfront in their titles and collages and outlook. Kiddie Lib, Grrrl talk. It has the feel of a jape, a St Trinians prank: *Hoora for Huggy!*) On the second EP, "kiss curl for the kid's lib guerrillas", the inside sleeve is a Situationist style screed: "A salute to the valiant chil-

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children's world terrorists — a revolution of imagination. The KLG write every where with grinding crayons and goldspray paint they take to the alleyways filling up the walls with invocations to nasty girls and ruffian boys ... scrawled stories and daydreams all around the parks and subways "A child underground, a children's crusade: magic marker scrawl across the peachy skin, bows decorate the hair, and any rational opposition from the 'adult' world sets their little feet a-stomping. Urban island drifts which simultaneously recall both the Situationist project and English child literature like *Swallows And Amazons* and *Lord of the Flies*.

It is plainly DESIGNED (or signed, scrawled, scratched) to irritate. Everywhere are signs of this deliberate provocation. "The Kids Luv Guerrillas are compulsive liars" On the label of "Her Jazz" — the most obviously anemic thing to date — is the legend "tacky theme tune." And right in the middle of the punky cut up lyrics to "Her Jazz" is, bigger than the rest: "BOY! GIRL! REVOLUTION! TEASE TEASE LYING."

As with most revolutionaries, the world has been slow to see the humour in the hubris. Because no matter how much the backroom boys of rock dismiss them as "silly", there must be something in their provocation to engender the mass flap/rap they have. Maybe the music is just an excuse for an almighty stir-up, in which case fine.

When I look at Huggy Bear, I see every British brattishness, a playing with stalled age (a persistent indie strain since CB6). When I listen, or read their (wo)manifesto ("a precise beat critique" indeed! Sounds like me in 79!), I'm reminded of that brief post-punk moment when a certain shaky trajectory could be drawn through the likes of early Scream, Polaris, Slits, Red Crayola, Raincoats, etc, even though in the final analysis they all probably had not much more in common than localities: Camden, Portobello, CB2. With Huggy you certainly get the same savour of post-al-code self-referentiality (their record label is even a post-Rough Trade post code — W11A = W11 1JA). Their records even have the same sound of tinny trulence, despondent dementia, speedy snobbery, as the earlier ideologues. Less like musical artefacts than Brit Situationist graffiti, signs for a different future, slashes across the social fabric, local heretics.

The records so far have been split between more obvious proto punk thrashes ("Her Jazz" being in every sense the most obvious) and a more experimental side: spooky bedroom collages full of overheard TV, notebook whispers, random hiss. Words and fragments fade in and out of straggly cloudy drifts of sound. "demons and angels ... right now I'm walking through the valley of death and I'm feelin' fine ... sacrifice my idea of pacifism ... follow my trail"

It's the sort of programmatic doodling that has a fine lineage, from Can and Faust to Ubu and 23 Skidoo to Mercury Rev. There are moments — especially on "kiss cunt", with its primitive synth noodles and squalling flute — when they sound just like the early Ubu of murmurs and smashed glass. All these bits and bobs are so brief they're more splinters than proper

'songs' or 'statements'. This is the side of them I like best — where they drop the plunky purky plod and drift off into dream space, escaping Planet Rock altogether, a private meander away from what's de rigueur. I've never been much of a guitar fan myself, and I'd be a lot happier if they took the guitars out altogether. That would really sound like a revolution.

And the more you look and listen the more it connects to the spooky-historical logic: Grel Marcus was trying to post in *Lipstick Traces*: it almost seems to obviate to locate them in this lineage, but I'll leave you to do your own work on that, class.

Meanwhile, consider a few scraps, chosen at random from Marcus. "It was an attempt to start a conversation — in which everyone would want to take part and that could only end in the discovery of a new language with a new subject. The voice is unfailingly logical, but it's the logic of people so caught up in their own vision that it can't explain anything to them. For anyone else, there are gaps in the logic that can't be closed. ... a tape composed of incomplete sentences, voices cut off or falling silent — a map made altogether of dead ends, where the only movement possible was not progress, not construction, but ncochet and surprise."

The key word here is map. Root Grrits (and passenger boys) have drawn a "psychogeographic" map of their own world, their own lives ("her jazz signals our time now") and in the process, discovered it held true for many others. They got tired of the official version (Who isn't? Outside of The Wire how many unofficial versions are there these days?) Huggy Bear are right to indict the smug, old, boy-stocked rock press and their obsession with annual Star construction/destruction. They're in the process of clearing away a new topographics of pop desire, which is far more exciting — and intelful (sic) — than anything they've so far recorded.

Maybe coming up with a brilliant title like "Rubbing The Impossible To Burst" is enough in itself: the music is a notional after effect. For kids so caught up on polysyllabic push, their music has next to no physique — it's anti-funk scribble, sex as sign language rather than workout.

But then maybe this too, is deliberate. It's waste and loss and snub and snarl for its own sake: pure expenditure "with nothing to lose" as a sleeve slip puts it. It turns the somnambulant indie sound away from mere product placement into savage product displacement. Even if they never made another record, they have proved that what animated Punk can emerge again when everyone thought it never could, and that just by the mere act of exorcising some snotty kids can rile everyone into mass pandemonium. And maybe this is why some commentators can't handle them: the taste for scrawl, the tendency to change their minds at the last minute and cancel interviews, the "irrational" spitefulness. They invite the media in, and then they bowl them out.

OK, so their music isn't as proficient as the latest Sugar album, or whatever, not as smooth, not as streamlined — but that, surely, is the point. They've rediscovered a lost world simply by going against the grain. Hoorah for Huggy, indeed. □



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Send your entries on a postcard (marked with the relevant competition, eg, 'Catfish', 'Di Meola', 'Capital') to June Competitions, The Wire, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, to reach us by Thursday 1 July.

Congratulations to our April competition winners — Eight Ball CDs go to Darren Grees, Suffolk; Emma Morrison, Manchester; Kevin Gammond, Worcester; Barrie Blazebay, Essex; Sam Abelman, London. Jammeral T-shirts go to Keith Moore, Glasgow; Phil Hume, Exeter; M.J. Saunders, Surrey. Buganin CDs go to Mike Waite, Liverpool; R.L. Toombs, London; Mark Whitley, Rugby; Peter Hanes, Middlesex; M Bailey, Derbyshire. Thanks to everyone who entered, and if you don't win, there's always this month!

Print run

File Under Popular: Theoretical And Critical Writings in Music

By Chris Cutler

BER SAGECORP (Pbk \$8.95)

When I reviewed this book the first time, eight years ago and still a little punk drunk, I took it as read that (a) rock music had considerable political value unique to it, and (b) the changes that have to be made to make it (or anything else) saleable are going to be damaging, especially in regard to (a). What's more, I assumed that everyone "knew" this — otherwise, why on earth would anyone have bought into rock culture at all? Perhaps I was naive, in those far-off days — and perhaps my review reflected this. Anyway, even though (a) and (b) make up a good deal of the purpose and point of drummer, label-boss and committed 68-er Cutler's "Writings", I didn't see fit to mention either. Cutler, in a subsequent interview, dismissed my review as "impressionist and irresponsible" — and I got a warm glow all over, convinced I'd scored some kind of intellectual victory.

The problem now — re-reviewing the somewhat rewritten *File Under Popular* — is that if (a) still seems to me obviously true, (b) doesn't not least because rock's popularity was so clearly linked to its supposed achievements in short-circuiting (b) — why else would a bunch of smart Cambridge crypto-Marxists like Cutler's own Henry Cow buy into it?

In outline, these dense essays, written in the early 80s, address just this issue — the nature of popular music, and the meaning of this curiously slippery word "popular" (capable, after all, of referring to a demanding and less-than-milkin-selling desident experimental/improv outfit like Cow — "popular" meaning of the people, if only they knew it). The essays

**This month, reviews
of books on left-field
rock criticism,
a curmudgeonly
composer and
music in the realm
of the psyche.**

particular innovations and progressions.

Once you get beyond the poverty of his writing style, Cutler manages to be at one and the same time exhilaratingly wide-ranging and provocatively self-serving. He has indeed found a place to stand and see and critique of music within a single philosophical-political theory, but only, or so it often seems, in order to proclaim the way ahead true Progress being the post-psychedelic music-making as pursued by and Cow and various Eurobuddies on Cutler's label (then named Recommended Records), and a very few others. While his version of Britrock history, for example, is no more perfunctory and misleading than the received standard version, it's still very inadequate. (His version of Elvis, and of most black music, is the received standard version).

Rock is a huge terrain, and the many ways it interacts with technology render Cutler's summaries a bit bald, a bit insular. In the matter of ProgRock's occlusion by punk, for example, Cutler tends to dodge and dive — he'll declare Procol Harum an embarrassment (leaky target, fair general point, odd particular word), but fast-forwards over those very real connections which Cow had, en masse, with the likes of Mike Oldfield (ie they hired themselves out to him), which were surely responsible for their subsequently being lumped in, in *lurperpunk* opinion, with over-elaborated, worthless ArtRock spectacle. And yet he dismissively summarises punk's own achievements in a similar, guilt-by-association kind of way. There's no mention, even to critique, of Chrome, say, or Throbbing Gristle, The Siks, The Pop Group, Wire, The Fall. Likewise there's no attempt to follow through, in his Phil Ochs piece, to

the status of such highly political post-folk pop songwriters as Elvis Costello. More to the point, there's no argument as to why he moves from the vastly general to the local, particular, and personally acquainted, as if nothing lay in between.

Actually, I think he's aware of this — there's a tone, in the rewrite, of a certain retreat, which for the sake of getting the argument out clearly and forcefully he downplays. He still has a problem with (b) — Chuck Eddy and Frank Kogan are the best theorists of the ways it might not be true — but as a smart, systematic, maddening examination of why (a) has occasionally been the case, *File* makes its disco remix.

MARK JINKER

Sorabji: A Critical Celebration

Edited by Paul Rapoport

SCOLAR PRESS (Hbk \$45)

This is a remarkable book about a remarkable and, until quite recently, forgotten composer — a collections of essays and reminiscences that tell far more than has previously been known about the life and work of Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji. Born in Chingford in 1892, long before Norman Tebbit made it famous as a totem of Tory brutality, "the Howard Hughes of music" lived a life of single-minded devotion to his art and, for the later part of his career, almost equally single-minded rejection of the musical establishment, at least as far as it concerned performance of his own work.

Sorabji's career (he died in 1988) was outlined by Max Harrison in *The Wire* 100. He was an arch-romantic who avowed "I am not a 'modern' composer in the inverted commas sense" But his admiration for Scriabin and Debussy, and his use of a truly

hinge on a semi-Marxist attempt to uncover how technological innovations in modern music, in particular the recording studio, have altered music's very nature, and how rock — intimately connected with these same innovations, of electrification and the recording studio — ought to bridge the gap between the "progressive" in music technology, the "progressive" in music, and the "progressive" in politics — though the sketchy history of progressive developments in rock in the UK is testament to how little he feels this is actually so. Three further pieces are devoted to Sun Ra, The Residents and Phil Ochs and Elvis Presley, as significant examples of

Oriental luxuriance and length, meant that his work, mostly for piano, made substantial demands of its audience, and on the few occasions it was performed by the composer was rarely received enthusiastically. Not that Sorabji minded. "If you don't like it... that is just too bad, but not for me, who couldn't care less. In fact, to me your disapproval is an indirect compliment and much less of an insult than your applause." (p. 345)

Sorabji eventually placed a virtual performing ban on his music, writing in 1959 "Why do I neither seek nor encourage performance of my works? Because they are neither intended for nor suitable for it under present, or indeed any foreseeable conditions and no performance at all is vastly preferable to an obscene travesty." But in the 1970s he relented, and John Ogden performed and, shortly before he died in 1989, recorded the four-hour-long piano solo *Opus Clavibambulatorium* (Altarus) (The Symphonic Variations for piano solo still await their probable eight-hour-long performance). The awesome problems involved in performing it are the topic of a fascinating discussion in the present volume by Geoffrey Hudge, one of its few other performers.

Sorabji was a person with strong opinions, and although Rapoport's book is intended primarily for music specialists, the composer's character is always making its entertaining presence felt. His many loathings and dislikes included Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, serialism, chamber music, the BBC, intellectuals ("one of those that is educated above their intelligence and perception"), ecumenical religion ("cheapjack sentimentalitarian bunkum"), and those who intruded on his jealously-guarded privacy. He referred to himself as a Spanish-Sicilian Parsi or Zoroastrian. "Mr Kaikhozi Shapurji Sorabji wishes it to be known that he emphatically contradicts and repudiates certain completely inaccurate and objectionable public references to himself as an 'Indian' composer."

[And] I am BY NO MANNER OF MEANS NOR IN ANY WAY

ENGLISH

A *Critical Celebration* deserves much praise for its strenuous efforts to clear up the misconceptions, some encouraged by the man himself, that have arisen about Sorabji. Its appearance follows new recordings of the composer by Yomfi Solomon and Marc-André Hamelin on the Altarus label. So perhaps now Sorabji's remarkable music (only a handful of which has ever been published, and most of this is now out of print) is at last receiving the attention it deserves.

ANDY HAMILTON

Music And The Mind

By Anthony Storr

HARPER COLLINS (Hbk \$16.99)

Roland Barthes once postulated that two types of music exist: those you listen to and those you play. Anthony Storr's book is primarily about the latter, and as a psychiatrist known for his arts-friendly approach to the creative process, you could expect him to say much that is informative and insightful.

And indeed he does. There are some fascinating references to muscogenic epilepsy, to the primacy of hearing among our sense organs and — borrowing some psychoanalytic terminology — to music as a kind of Rorschach blot upon which identities and moods are projected.

The words Storr actually uses are "projective techniques", he is talking about a process identified by Freud, but trying at the same time to avoid psychoanalytic jargon. This is not just out of courtesy to his lay readers, it's also an indication (dare I say symptom?) of a very real problem at the heart of this book. The problem lies in the tedious feud between psychiatric medicine and psychoanalytic theory (no-one with more than a cursory contact with the field will be surprised to learn that). It's a pity that as popular a writer as Storr perpetuates the conflict, after a few off-target thrusts at Freudian theory, Storr devotes a whole chapter, *Escape From Reality?*, to an attack on analysts that has all the finesse of a nail-bomb explosion. He seems outraged at

Freud's theory that art exists through sublimated libido. Storr concludes that this means that Freud is suggesting that all artists are neurotics in a state of "arrested sexual development". Actually, it doesn't — similarly, analytic concepts of fantasy, "oceanic feelings" and regression are not used (by analysts) in the pejorative manner that Storr imagines. They're categories, not aberrant states of mind that should be "cured".

Both Freud and Jung died with their disinterest in music on the record (so to speak). Storr — he looks an energetic 60 odd years old — will not be joining them. Storr's personal enjoyment in music is undeniable. He prefers "classical or Western 'art' music". Fine. But a focus that extended beyond this European scheme would have been welcome. Numerous musics exist, the effects of which are worthy of psychiatric attention. Yet minimal or repetitive music is all but ignored, although numerous writers (Wim Mertens, for instance) have written of its hypnotic effects. Ambient music gets a short anecdote about Sade. Blink and you'll miss serialism (Webern is "hard to grasp") altogether. It's a pity, too, that he's so disinterested in pop music, an area rich with material for a researcher in arousal and stimuli. A friend of mine, who divided his time between energetic disco dancing and a PhD thesis in philosophy, once declared to me his certitude that the structure of the nyc Peech Boys' hit "Don't Make Me Want You" mimicked, in all its delay, tension and final expansion, the male orgasm. I suspect — I can only suspect — that he was probably right.

Dr Storr's reaction to this we can only guess at. He is, like much of the music he likes, a romantic. He avoids narratives — musical or analytical — that stray this way and that, to archaic structures, to metonymies, to fantasy and reverie. His neurology is probably impeccable, but the book that discusses the way that music arrives out of one person's world to intervene in another's is yet to be written.

LOUISE GRAY



reel to reel

When Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* was screened to great success at Cannes in 1990, and subsequently toured the arthouse cinemas of the world, it catapulted Japanese Anime (animation) out of the Sci-Fi ghetto it had long inhabited in the West and into the cinematic mainstream. *Akira* was like no other cartoon you'd ever seen. Set in a radiation-blasted neo-Tokyo of 2019, it was a non-stop, accelerator-to-the-floor ride through a dystopian landscape of decaying shopping malls and new age slums, inhabited by gangs of motorcycle punks, terrorists and a hero invested with the mythic superpowers of Japanese legend. These amoral characters moved through a towering skyscape that fused Gotham City with the LA of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*: dark, sinister and instantly familiar. Ultimately exhausting in its pace and ferocity, *Akira* was animation for a generation born to surf. 30 channel cable TV, a kinetic nightmare of postmodern reference points.

Since *Akira*, which was actually made in 1987, the British video market has been assailed by a string of releases that are collectively and incorrectly known as *Manga* (which is actually the generic Japanese term for comics). Helped by a general upsurge in the fortunes of animation and an increasing interest in Japanese pop culture, Anime has now come to represent a unique intersection where Western sci-fi mingles with Hollywood and the fables of ancient Japan.

This cross-pollination can be seen in a film like *Lensman*, the latest Anime video to emerge in the UK. Based on US author E.E. "Doc" Smith's novels of the same name, it's a mix of computer-generated animation sequences and hand-drawn cels that relay the

Since the mid-80s, Japanese animation (Anime) has been fusing Samurai legend with Hollywood plots and the culture of cyberpunk. Couch potato David Eimer settles in with the VCR as a new batch of Anime videos are unleashed in the UK.



story of Kimball Kinnison, a farm boy who's swept into a war between the Galactic Alliance and the evil Boskone empire. Enrolled into an elite brotherhood with special powers, Kim, is the only one who can save the galaxy.

If the story sounds familiar that's because *Lensman* directors Yoshiaki Kawajiri and Kazuyuki Hirokawa have lifted the plot and lead characters from George Lucas's *Star Wars* epic (which was itself directly influenced by Smith's work). The exchange of ideas and influences doesn't stop there. The animation mimics the *Star Wars* sets and models and the costumes have been pinched wholesale. At the same time though, Smith's stories of men gifted with supernatural strength and energy, doomed to roam the universe as eternal troubleshooters, owed much to the Samurai legends of Imperial Japan. These also pop up in *First Of The North Star* which has a Japanese version of the Spaghetti Western man-with-no-name strolling through a world that duplicates the devastation of *Mad Max* (and of course the Leonardo Eastwood character originally came from Kurosawa's comic take on the Samurai "Yojimbo").

If Anime borrows from its creators' past and a wide range of Western sources, it also takes on some rather dubious baggage. Films like *First Of The North Star* and Hideki Takayama's visceral *Urotsukidōji: Legend Of The Overlord* and *Urotsukidōji II: Legend Of The Demon Worm* are full of exploitative scenes where blood and internal organs spray out and grinning men slobber lasciviously over nude women. But while the animators have no problem including sequences that are ripped straight out of porn flicks, prospective Japanese law

forbids them from drawing in actual genitalia, which only adds to the films sense of warped, random morality.

In the past two years "traditional" cartoon-based Anime films have been somewhat superseded by filmmakers striving to reproduce the genre's cultural collisions and spirit on live action film. Young director Shinya Tsukamoto is at the forefront of such efforts. His extraordinary *Tetsuo: Ironman* and its sequel *Tetsuo II: Bodyhammer*, both now issued for the first time on video, were hailed as the first cyberpunk movies by William Gibson, author of *Neuromancer*, the novel that launched the cyberpunk genre. Tsukamoto's story of a salaryman who mutates into a metal monster is framed by a collage of mad, speeded-up chases and flashbacks that aim to simulate the frenetic pacing of the original Anime films. Complementing this is a metallic, hard edged soundtrack by Chu Ishikawa that links the film to such outcroppings of Western industrial culture as the compositions of Einstürzende Neubauten and Test Department. Like them the film is more concerned with form and style than anything else.

For the moment, the *Tetsuo* films are there to be experienced rather than enjoyed. But they also offer a portent of what might be possible in live-action film when cinematic technology catches up with the imagination of film-makers like Tsukamoto. At the moment only animation can merge man and machine and make it plausible. Accordingly, *Manga* and Anime will continue as the preferred format for cyberpunk enthusiasts, East and West. □

All the films mentioned are now available on video through Manga Communications.



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LIVING COLOUR
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soundcheck

WIRE WINNER: *visioning the future*

Bandulu

Guidance

IMPONET INFO3 CD/LP

In *The Wire* 111 David Toop defined the vaporous ache in the music of such Ambient Techno operatives as Aphex Twin, Black Dog and B12, as nostalgia for unattainable worlds. Similar utopian imaginings of future/parallel space drift through Guidance, the debut album from North London duo Bandulu (aka Thunderground, ECC, Sounds Of The Subway, etc.) The evidence is there in the track titles ("Messengers", "Revelation", "Peacekeeper"), but also in the nebulous bleeps and pings that pulse throughout the record, transmitting signals of terrible longing deep into the electronic ether.

Paranoia lurks in these grooves too — the malevolent ambience of future-present urban dystopias and the megacity's insidious brutalisation of public and private space, are reflected back in the portentous chords that arch out over great distances, and the hard surface of jackhammer beats.

"Groups" like Bandulu are stating the case for Techno as a protean, visionary mode of psychic transportation, as opposed to pure reductionist body music. Tracks like "Guidance" and "Tribal Reign" comment on the tragic yearning of the contemporary human condition, our desire to evacuate familiar, designated space for areas of Otherness, difference, while the dosing seconds of "Rex" alone are enough to suggest entire new worlds on the horizon, sounding like fragments from a projected Jon Hassell record or a field



recording of Savannah drums relayed through the static interference of modern telecommunications systems (which anyway might amount to the same thing).

Throughout the record's duration, the listening environment becomes a dense cluster where sonic pulses descend and envelop at terrific speed. Breakbeats warp out of their original timeframe into liquid transmat propulsion. Cavernous, body-wrenching glitches in the beat are factored in. Haunted by primordial visions, Tribal voices rising out of digital circuitry, beats fragmenting, multiplying, replicating in the cybernet's long loop of night into day.

TONY HERRINGTON

WIRE WINNER: *anti-gangsta freestorm*

Freestyle Fellowship

Inner City Gnats

4TH & BROADWAY BR 595 CD/MC/LP

The word "freestyle" does not have positive associations, even for those twisted enough to be able to tolerate televised swimming. Freestyle is rap's jam session: a blast for those concerned but a pain for the listener. All too often going back to the roots of creativity means disregarding your music's golden rule, which is that to be really effective, spontaneity needs practise. In the context of a four-piece mainly vocal ensemble from South Central LA, who are being set up as an opposition pole to Gangsta rap, "Yellowship" is not too encouraging either. It's a bit cuddly

— what is this, the Mint Juleps from hell?

But then the music starts. Or to be more precise the talking. There's a sample credit to one M Davis, but it's just some guy ranting about blood, and then they kick into "Bulies On The Block" — a couple of fat Clinton/Colins jeep-beat samples spark into life and rolling tongues spit fire on the heads of Ice Cube et al in a lampoon so devastating as to suggest the MIC is mightier than the GAT. The voices of M'kah, Acey, Jup and Peace are pumped up to bursting point. The language too seems to be on the point of exploding, so much is there to be said.

Words cascade throughout with the awesome power of The Last Poets, and none of the unsavoury overtones of women only being allowed out of the house with bags over their heads. Things open out a lot after the stunning uprightness of the initial assault — there is room for food and sex and even a little mild recreational drug use in the lyrical pile-up.

There is a back-to-basics feel about the music, but this is no old school reunion. It's a step forward. Gent wobbly bass-lines and other "real instruments" twist in and out of sampled strands (Henry Mancini — claim your respect) and it's hard to know or care if this is HipHop being the new bebop or the old one. It's the voices that get you though — the sudden burst of pure song on "Inner City Boundaries", the discipline with which they take on and put to the sword the freestyle dragon on the excellent "Heavyweights". You have to listen to all this three times (well I did) before it even starts to fall into

In Soundcheck:

Reviews of Sun Ra, Throbbing Gristle, Jungle Brothers, PJ Harvey, Syd Barrett, Arvo Pärt, the Brötzmann family and Monk with Coltrane

In Outline:

Nick Kimberley sings the praises of recent gospel releases

In Brief:

Kodwo Eshun riffs relentlessly on the new club trax

shape. File alongside The Goats album under "Listen and Learn"

BEN THOMPSON

WIRE WINNER: *orkestral manoeuvres*
Sun Ra & His Arkestra With Symphony Orchestra
Pleades

LEO RECORDS LR 210/211 CD

Sun Ra is (orca) 80 years old and hennas his beard. His music is similarly incongruous. Here he records the Arkestra with a symphony orchestra, but close-mikes Talvin Singh's tablas and India Cooke's violin, so that their expressive finger-on-instrument immediacy dispels any hint of classical formality. "Pleades" uses a banal three note figure that recalls "Jesus Christ Superstar", but altist Marshall Allen plays saxophone extremities that indicate where John Zorn is coming from. A Chopin prelude lifts into alto-squalls worthy of Godzilla and absurd fairground chinking from the synth. Sun Ra address beyond reckoning.

Recorded at the Théâtre Carré St. Vincent on 27 October 1990, the sound is immaculate, suggesting a state radio broadcast (there is no producer listed and no notes to explain who financed this Arkestra/Orchestra encounter).

If you like to fix on the single, perfect artwork, Sun Ra is not for you. Like Duke Ellington, Sun Ra exfoliates a baroque fractal, the seething wake of intelligence on the move in unit pastures. "Sun Procession" is a typical Ra anthem, a march whose tawdry splendour suggests some historically-inaccurate Carthaginian legion wending its way through the desert heat-haze. Bolted together out of the debris of the mass culture

Further consumer info: labels not named in this column should be obtainable at good specialist stores — or through such sterling distributors as New Note, Harmonia Mundi, Cadillac, Impetus, These ...

Infonet: through Pinnacle

Leo: through Cadillac

industry — cocktail tinkering, military fanfares, Miklos Rozsa filmcores, free-jazz obstreperousness — Ra creates a junk epic that points to the precariousness of the spell of art.

Sun Ra's four-decade output has piled up into the Mount Eiger of discography (merely listing his record labels causes problems, some of the pressings consist of single copies!) — but this can nevertheless be recommended as a place to start. Confounding rumours that he went off the ball in the 80s, *Pleades* is a triumphant compendium of Sun Ra's polymorphous ingenuity.

BEN WATSON

WIRE WINNER: *from the death factory*
Throbbing Gristle
Live Vols 1-4

GREY AREA OF MUTE TGCD10/11/12/13
4CDs

Unlike the majority of their contemporaries — Cabaret Voltaire, Joy Division/New Order, Sex Pistols — time has not made Throbbing Gristle any easier to swallow: their sound is as cold and skin-peelingly ugly as it ever was. I recall misspent nights in TG's company asking where's the pleasure in this unrelenting barrage of negativity? What satisfaction were they getting from clearing halls and driving those who stayed behind into a murderous frenzy — often directed at the group themselves? *Castrator* movies flickered dimly, scolding static and incendiary feedback threatened to engulf songs, and Genesis P. Orridge's voice would emerge from this grim aural apocalypse intact, whining, wheeling or cajoled listeners with his diseased

defrocked vicar-ish tales of what he'd like to do to little girls.

Personally I didn't get it until they were gone. Joy Division had already disappeared after Ian Curtis's suicide. All the seriousness had gone out of music, and elsewhere, the wrierly likes of Dum Dum Thomas initiated the literati with the oh-so-tastefully handled death camp sex in *The White Hotel*. Suddenly the value of TG's stratagems became clear. When you're tackling the ugly spirit coursing the 20th century head on, then the music has every right to be grim. The rewarding pleasure is the revelation of that spirit's presence in the glum realities of 70s Britain.

Things haven't improved so much in the intervening years as to render their findings invalid. On the contrary the dreary, blasted landscapes invoked by TG noise, populated by the tragic little inverts acted out onstage by Genesis, the sort of innocuous squirt featured in the *Sundays* who turns out to be Dennis Nielsen, are still very much present. One set of coordinates for TG Live 1976-80 — 280 minutes culled from 36 concerts and formatted to resemble four TG shows of differing vintages — could be Harold Pinter, the *Corry Ons* and the *News Of The World*. They traced a line through the soot-enriched grime of post-war Britain, from the gummy ill-fitting dentures of grin-and-bear-it Brit comedy to Myra Hindley. They exposed the deathbeat sheltering behind the prissy prur imagination that hedge in English perceptions.

That's not to say TG's kied, viciously satirical trip was too localised to travel. Scratch a star



deviant like Manson and you reveal a man every bit as wretched as a cringing Cricklewood killer. Maybe, later, *Psychic TV* could be accused of sanctifying such star deviants as Jim Jones, but TG, the most deviant of the punk era's cold stars, made no such errors. They were most accurate in transcribing peculiar psychological extremes as music. They invented a Pre-sampler utility from a battery of personal tape recorders for distorting, prated broadcast snatches of news into something resembling truth. Much of what they did with synthesizers, loops, sheering guitar and sound ragouts is now common practise in HipHop, electronic body music and the whinnying NINny industrialism of the likes of Trent Reznor and Ministry. But unlike TG they all want to be loved. Throbbing Geste live were as unlovely as they come and they should be cherished for it.

BIBA KOPF

soundcheck

Barry Adamson
The Negro Inside Me
MUTE STUMM 120 CD

Holger Czuyak
Moving Pictures
MUTE STUMM 125 CD

More music for imaginary pictures. Ex-Bad Seed Barry Adamson declared his allegiance to the visual when he made a momentous and chilling movie-for-the-ears, *Moss Side Story*; since then he's turned to real-life soundtracking (*Gas Food Lodging*) and now plans to get behind a camera himself. Holger Czuyak, meanwhile, has encouraged us to think of his records visually ever since his first post-Cin album *Movies*; although since then, the flicks have been so personal as to be barely readable, crazed edits by an increasingly askew outeur.

There's a difference in approach. Czuyak's music encourages you to visualize movement in an imaginary 3D-plus-space; Adamson's, more simply, makes specific references to particular retro styles of colour and cool. Czuyak's album, despite



Lee: through Cadillac

Avant, Soul Note: through Harmonia Mundi

Touch & Go: through Southern

Black & Blue: through Koch

Stash: 140 West 22nd Street, NYC, NY 10011, USA

the titular reference back to *Movies*, still finds him in the doldrums, although he's clearly settled in quite comfortably. His most austere work for some time uses the spatial mappings of dub — an inchoate throb, footsteps resounding in deep void, a Nico-soundlike intoning about "the dark side of the moon" (some unlikely affiliations here?). It's still a little vaporous, but it has a nice sense of the provisional about it.

Adamson's album is tightly anchored to terra firma, paying homage to 60s film, paying homage to 60s soundtrackry — fast cars and spy movie horns. The opening "The Snowball Effect" is a ferocious graft of suprema Jimmy Smith organ to a mule-kick rhythm track, but things then subside too much into hyperanimated club funk. A near-carbon copy cover of Serge and Jane's "Je T'Aime" is fun but pointless, but things recoup nicely with the closer, a somnolent xylophone swing straight out of an old Jacques Tab film for a particularly mellow episode of *Play School*. Two tracks at least worth breaking out the popcorn for.

JONATHAN ROMNEY

Africando
Trovador
STERN STCD 1045 CD/VC

Various Artists
Cuba, Fully Charged
EARTHWORKS CEVW 3D CD/VC

Trovador is a classic style salsa album, but with Senegalese vocalists (singing about porridge and fishing) fronting the Nuyorican orchestra. This might seem an incongruous combination if the love affair between Senegalese and Cuban music wasn't such an old one. In the 60s and 70s Cuban music played a major role in many African musicians' search for identity (including Orchestra Baobab and Youssou N'Dour). It was also something that had to be worked through in the search for a more original, specifically African sound (partly signalled by the replacement of Cuban-derived congas with sabbas and djembes), which is much of what the last 15 years of African music have been about. Perhaps the fact that recent Senegalese pop has managed to

produce such utterly distinct performers as Kine Lam and Thieme Seck means that such a nostalgic operation as *Trovador* is not only possible but could be carried out with such conviction, depth and passion.

Cuba — Fully Charged is an expertly collated compilation of recent and not-so-recent recordings from classic and contemporary Afro-Cuban performers, including Carlos Embale and Adalberto Alvarez. Recording dates are not included but the focus here is as much on Cuban music's still vital present as its glorious past. Superb.

RICHARD SCOTT

Louis Armstrong
With Fletcher Henderson 1924-1925
FORTE F-38001/2/3 CD

Louis Armstrong
Great Standards Vol 1
BLACK & BLUE 59.226 CD

Satchmo Legacy Band
Salute To Pops Vol 2
SOUL NOTE 121166 CD

Murray/Cheatham/Schoenberg/Lowe
A Modern Portrait Of Louis Armstrong
STASH ST-CD-563

To hear the young Armstrong breaking through the dry clay soil of Henderson's early band is not just an exercise in archaeology but an eternal re-creation of the impact he must have had on other musicians as well as audiences.

Henderson aspired to greatness, or at least popularity, and modelled himself on the compromises of Paul Whiteman's ethnically cleansed assembly. It sounds like a stereotype to say that Louis just cut the crap and expressed himself, but the audiences and the musicians realised it in increasing numbers. The moral of the second album title is that these songs from 1928-32 would never have become standards if Armstrong hadn't recorded them, all 20 of them, from "Basin Street" to the one that gives the record label its name.

The sudden surge of interest in

Armstrong must be thanks to the Marsals family. As well as the albums listed above, there's also something new credited to Bob Thiele and featuring Red Rodney and Joshua Redman (Louis Satchmo on Red Barron). But, of the two tributes to hand, the Soul Note features Freddie Hubbard and Alvin Batiste with a septet including older Al Casey and Red Callender. Veering wildly between sloppy re-creation and jazziest indulgence, Hubbard has a hard time just making the notes.

The man behind the Stash is arranger/producer Allen Lowe, who recorded his nonet at the Knitting Factory and includes originals along with 20s material such as "Black And Blue." I suppose it makes sense to list David Murray first — he has so few records out — but the spark is the inclusion of trumpeter Doc Cheatham, who was there at the time (born 1905). Schoenberg is Loren, a replication specialist but here blowing free, while straight copying is the last thing on Lowe's mind. If you can imagine an Armstrong project by Mike Westbrook, it would be a little like this.

BRIAN PRIESTLEY

Syd Barrett

Crazy Diamond: The Complete Recordings

EMI/HARVEST SYD BOX 1 CD

20 odd years after Syd Barrett released his last album the myth staggers on — apocryphal and factual tales of oddball dementia and the miscast image of Barrett as twilight zone acid-head, madman and poetic misfit.

Away from all this baggage (and the feeble imitative antics of Robyn Hitchcock and Julian Cope), the facts are quite different. Barrett has been described as "your standard middle-class Rimbaud figure", but whereas the great French poet deliberately and irrevocably severed links with his muse at 21, Barrett struggled to communicate as his huge talent disintegrated, for reasons beyond his control. Problems began in the Pink Floyd era when getting his spontaneity down on tape was fraught with difficulty. Within a few years — as the out-takes album *Qeel*

demonstrates — it had given away to semi-coherence.

Great songs hint at something outside themselves — but here it was more that the actual songs were being hinted at. The listener has the dual task of performing a mental join-the-dots and sharing the experience of an artist's creativity failing to pieces — "Birdy Hop" and "The World Song" especially, are uncomfortable, unfathomable sketches. Even with flashes of brilliance shining through the murk, *Qeel* remains one of the most harrowing 40 minutes of music yet compiled.

When he left Pink Floyd in '68, Barrett was thought (potentially) more likely to succeed than his former colleagues. But producer Peter Jenner was later quoted "I seriously underestimated the problems of working with him."

Jenner's successor Malcolm Jones eventually got half of Barrett's solo debut. *The Madcap Laughs* in the can (with Soft Machine providing some backing), but with deadlines to meet Barrett was rushed back in at the 11th hour to record some solo acoustic tracks to fill out the tape. Despite this, *Madcap* features many of his best songs. There are some bizarre moments — the infamous page-turning on "She Took A Long Cold Look" for example — but also shots of genius, in the poignant abstract yearning of "Feel", "Long Gone" and "Late Night".

Barrett lacks its predecessor's compelling atmospheres, with the cobblestoned journey ensemble of Dave Gilmour, Rick Wright and Humble Pie drummer Jerry Shirley having problems in keeping up with Barrett's increasingly vague drift. "Gigolo Aunty" is an assured surrealist jaunt, but "Hassie" is an idea half-heartedly trying to shape itself. "Rats", though, works brilliantly, a rapid fire stream of images over meandering guitar lines, a song starting from A and going to B to find out what it will become.

This collection should remain the definitive testament to Barrett's talent and finally set his (living) ghost to rest.

DAVE MORRISON

Blind Idiot God

Cyclotron

AVANT AVAN 010 CD

Pelvo

Today's Active Lifestyles

TOUCH & GO TS 114 CD

Mind Over Four

Half Way Down

ROADRUNNER RR 9072 2 CD

Last seen on these shores around four years ago (playing an entirely ill-suited jazz festival), and no new album having been released since 1988's *Underflow* an Enemy, Blind Idiot God had long been given up for dead. Their return (courtesy of John Zorn's Avant label) is not as welcome as it might have been, if only because, three time round, BIG simply haven't developed their sound, preferring to remain with the tried and tested instrumental wave-form guitar work that made their first two albums so utterly distinctive. And, yes, they still do those awful, pointless *non sequitur* dubs.

It's not that *Cyclotron* is an especially bad album — judged by their own standards, next to previous releases, it's probably the strongest set they have done — rather that for a band with such explosive promise and so unique a sound to be content merely to affirm what they already know, and not explore further, is rich on criminal. Stasis is not progression.

Progressive in both intent and period sound are Pelvo, who hail from the North Carolina Chapel Hill scene that's most infamous for launching the truly awful Superchunk onto the world. Pelvo's second album has all the credentials for a bona fide instant indie rock classic — a wayward, off-kilter, retuned guitar mesh that's distinctive enough to avoid the looming shadow of Sonic Youth references. Capable of spawning evocative instrumental and annoyingly catchy idiot-pop ("Time Isn't On My Side", something of an anthem back at the flat *inokes* sense — Ed!), as well as the more usual post-Throwing Muses dervish marches, *Today's Active Lifestyles* is as exuberant and tongue-in-cheek forward-looking as its title.

Mind Over Four are weaker, but

no less committed to the baroque obsession with detail and allegory. *Half Way Down* is justifiably epic in length (60 minute CD) and scale, the band's intricate metal forcefully led by Spike Xavier's howl. Far from being yet another funk-rock multi-genre crossover, *Mind Over Four* seem to span all the various disparate genres of 90s rock/metal, from Soundgarden and Metallica to Vowid. It's metal in the round (in the musical rather than the arena sense). Sadly, I suspect that despite heavy plugging and namechecks from big names like Pantera, *Mind Over Four* are probably only destined to play in the round of a cult fanbase's collective head, rather than in US stadia. Which is a shame, as *Half Way Down* exceeds nearly all the major label rock albums of the past two years in stature as well as artistic ambition.

JAKUBOWSKI

Anthony Braxton

Quartet (Coventry) 19BS

LEO CDLR2045

This is the last concert of Braxton's 19BS UK tour with his Cnsel/Dresser/Hemingway team. Besides the music there are extracts, lasting an hour, from conversations between Braxton and Graham Lock. Quite apart from a blessed absence of anecdotes, Braxton is articulate about his music's structuring and there are ringing phrases such as "only in jazz is 'thinking' a dirty word".

Such an assertion is expected from one often dismissed as too formal, too deliberately complex, particularly as such charges are fully discredited by the communicative fire of these often impassioned performances. As this music shifts its emphases we seem to hear the ensemble in different perspectives, no wonder Braxton claims that he sees his pieces as three-dimensional paintings. As is by now well known, his quartet performances are essentially collages of parts of different compositions, often juxtaposed, sometimes used simultaneously. Improvisation is also present, of course, but I suspect that nobody except members of the group could be sure just what is written and what spontaneous, and that is

a promising state of affairs

Two processes continue here. Although Braxton rather compartmentalises his large output, he periodically reverts to quartet format — as Guffre has to the trio — as a means of further exploring relationships between his several lines of development. Thus most aspects of his creativity are fed into the music. Secondly, by the time of this tour the detailed interaction between members of the ensemble amounted to a continuing discovery of the musical material's implications. The results sounded both freer and more complicated and yet, paradoxically, more under Braxton's control. As Marilyn Crispell said in *The Wire* 86, "It's totally his music" even if they do improvise. And this, I believe, is what jazz composers from Morton onwards have always aimed for and occasionally achieved.

MAX HARRISON

Caspar Brötzmann Massaker Kokosfen

BNF CAT ABB 52 CD

Peter Brötzmann Tentet The Muz'Combo Live In Wuppertal FMP CD 47

The bad press/worse sales treatment, dished out to loud, visceral, amplified classics like *Tauhid*, *Dark Magus*, *Sextant* or *Last Exit* (all of which are only available as rare, infrequently Japanese imports) may substantiate the claim that our electrophobic taste police have outlawed electrical innovations in jazz. Or maybe they simply preferred the old thing to the new thing? Whatever happened to the electronic revolution?

Massaker may not strictly qualify as a "jazz" trio, but five minutes into "Schlaf", ex-Gore drummer Danny Lommen detonates free time explosions, a steroid fuelled Rashied Ali reincarnate, straining to beat his drums back down to wooden pulp, while band leader Caspar Brötzmann hovers above, sustaining soaring guitar arcs, to fend off the rhythmic bombardment, emulating the sound of a propeller driven aircraft, diving at will.

Assaulting his guitar above and

below the neck Brötzmann bullies and coaxes intimate whispers and violent screams throughout the stark five song set. The amplified string creaks on "Wiege" and the blows to the guitar body on the title track (which resulted in a badly swollen hand and ice treatment) are a taut, minimalist, the key to these claustrophobic and charged tracks.

He's mostly jettisoned the distraction of the badly pronounced English, which had marred previous releases. Now his terse, multi-tracked native tongue punctuates the scrapes, harmonic sparks and crackling interference that make up Massaker's domain. Like his father, Peter (whom he joins in the Muz'Combo), Caspar is more interested in refinement than development. Stylistically stripping the blues from Hendrix (just as the saxophonist grated the gospel from Ayler), he loses the family line by not compromising his approach, regardless of the environment. On *The Muz'Combo*, with the aid of fellow guitarist Nicky Skopelitis and trumpet mutant Toshiron Kondo, Caspar breathes electrical life into what could have been an acoustically predictable project.

In *Last Exit* or on *Low Life* (with Bill Laswell), the wildman of Wuppertal relished a primitive scream against technology, and pitted his iron lungs against apparently insurmountable volume. This time he listens, aims and fires his overblown broadsides at appropriate targets, as opposed to the blast-first/ask-questions-later bluster of old. Still dense and intense, this release marks a triumphant return to form.

"Part One" is a mysterious tour of the *Autographs* — not the streamlined dreams of Kraftwerk, but the real life psychos of acceleration addiction and traffic jam congestion (as William Parker's bassline careers into a succession of multi-instrument pile-ups). But it is the honking, snarling demolition derby of "Part Three" that hits the mark most often. Veering from meditative solos to white-knuckle kamikaze raids, it burns with a fervent intensity, electrified and electrifying.

K. MARTIN

Chuck Brown & The Soul Searchers

This Is A Journey Into Time

MINOR MUSIC MFI 801029 CD

Whatever happened to Go-Go? Occasionally, this question fits in and out of polite conversation as if the fate of Atlantis was being discussed. Maybe a collective guilt plagues those of us who were involved in the great Go-Go hype of 1985, no matter how peripherally.

All cities have their ups and downs, but whatever happened to the bulk of Washington DC's musicians, the originator is still working. Chuck Brown's influence on the DC music scene was an odd one, since he was an older man who would probably have preferred to work in the bebop era. His formula of linking unrelated songs over a continuous beat could be caricatured as "Stars On 45", but is distinguished from that helish prospect by the refreshing choice of material, the loopy mid-tempo rhythms and the quality of musicianship.

Some of the songs on this new collection overlap previous releases — "Harlem Nocturne", "We Need Some Money" and "Stormy Monday". There's no Phil Collins, mercifully (anybody who saw the band play at London's Town & Country will know what I'm talking about) but there is "Red Top", a Chuck Brown natural, plus a straight ballad reading of "Since I Fell For You". There is also a party version of "Tutu", which certainly shakes a bit of life into a Marcus Miller tune that seemed, shall we say, inflexible up until now.

Unfortunately *Journey Into Time* cannot be recommended over the four brilliant EPs released on Future in 1986/87. The songs need to be more condensed for home consumption, plus the sound is a little thin. But what the hell, you buy what you can get and Chuck Brown is one of life's originals.

DAVID TOOP

Charles Brown Blues and Other Love Songs MUSE M5466 CD

Charles Brown Someone To Love MUNICH RECORDS MTF9514 CD

Born in 1920 in Texas City, Charles Brown was part of the mass black immigration to the war-economy industrial boom zone that was 40s California. He had a massive hit in 1946 with "Driftin' Blues", a smoochy, bluesy track with an arresting, grainy vocal. His bassist Eddie Williams described the singer-pianist's appeal like this "Charles at that time lacked the polish of the professional, but he had the technique. Nat [King Cole] never did that well in the black market. So we took Nat's sound back into the blues."

Call it super-colour blues then, or "sepe Sinatra" music, but Charles Brown was the best (Dr John out the exquiste In A Sentimental Mood as a tribute to Ray Charles — and to Brown).

These are two recent recordings and I'm pleased to report that Charles has still got it. *Blues And Other Love Songs* is graced with Houston Person on tenor sax — badback easy jazz blues with Brown's sleepy-eyed, honeyed tones right up against the ear. This is the real bourbon-on-the-piano stuff — Johnny Halstones meets Cecil Gant. Brown's clunking piano also has intriguing echoes of Thelonious Monk. Someone To Love has Bonnie Raitt guesting (one vocal, one slide guitar number) which is fine if you're not allergic to country singing or big names (I'm not, either time) and Clifford Solomon on tenor.

Charles Brown provides music full of intriguing felicities, a lesson in the generous scope of the blues. The simultaneous anguish and smile in his voice is like a hot bath for tired bones. Necessary.

BEN WATSON

Loi Coxhill Et Fred Frith French Gags AYAA CDT0991 CD

Coxhill (on soprano saxophone) and Frith (on guitar, table and things) have been wandering

around the outer perimeters of enough musics — rock, jazz, improvisation, folk — for so long that any attempt at generic categorization would be laughable.

These duo improvisations from 1983 cover a gamut of musical personalities and recording qualities, sometimes expansive, beautiful, lush, sometimes dry, scratchy and obscure. The two pace around each other, provide contexts for each other, listen and respond in ways that rarely amount to any particular style or approach. The music is never in a rush to find or reveal an identity, and reveals little about the psychologies of the players. As such there is not a lot to go on, and no particular reason why it should work as well as it does. If it helps, Frith often sounds like an orchestra, Coxhill like bagpipes and they sound as if they like each other well enough not to care too much what happens.

It's great: one of the few recordings of improvisation that continues to beguile and seduce after several listens.

RICHARD SCOTT

Cranes

Forever
DEDICATED DECD009 CINCIPAL

Heather Nova

Glow Stars
BIG LIFE NFCD 2 CINCIPAL

Some pull the blind when night falls, others leave it open and bathe with their secrets in the moonlight. Cranes sound more than ever like they've got some terrible knowledge to hide — their exoskeletal arrangements for strummed acoustic guitars and synthesized harp-blips form a clanging prison around Alison's lilting babytalk. They are in fact close to the original incarnation of Goth — not your Nephis or Mesh, but cold, haunted voices studied with silverpoint flashes of insight. Yet the odd phrases that do emerge audibly from the impossibly elided and regressive singing style make me wonder if there is enough substance to support the mystique they command: the e.e.cummings-ish list of titles ("Everywhere", "Cloudless", "Jewel", "Far Away",

Leo: through Cadillac

FMP, Ayac: through Impetus

Big Cat: through Pinnacle/RTM

Big Life: through APT/Revolver

Minor Music: through New Note

Dr Jim's: PO Box 45, Clifton Hill, Victoria 3068, Australia

Siam: 3 Thelesger Road, Abingdon OX1 2DX



"Clear", "And Ever", etc) reflect the lyrics' diffuse dreams and unformed aspirations. Despite the undoubtedly fine musical imagination — the Scott Walker grandeur of "Far Away", the jail-door slams of "Admit" — the album comes across as a portrait of a mind locked in depression, gazing at freedom from within the nunnery gates.

Heather Nova has similar aspirations, her excellent record begins "I wanna live where the sky is big/Simple and free/That's where I wanna be." What makes Glow Stars such a stoned black olive among drab greens is the way it enacts the imaginative leap towards freedom. 'Course, it helps having been reared in a hippy idyll in Bermuda. Her 12 self-produced songs are shot through with the snarling, life-affirming spirit of Patti Smith and the localised rock poetry of Joni or Suzanne Vega, but the impetus is always towards getting romantically buck naked on the ocean shore rather than talking about it with your best friend in the back room. The songs are hooky with plenty of stratospheric electronics and wozzy cocktails of background effects, but Heather's malleable, deceptively ingenious voice is always upfront, staking for adventure.

Recommendably ravishing
ROB YOUNG

Dr Phibes and the House Of Wax Equations

Hypnotwisters
SO SEAL STOPFREES CD00P1

"A bunch of friends with a collective persona as ungainly as the times they're trying to survive," it says here. This is the press release equivalent of the kitten in its petshop which belly flops into its water saucer in the hope of catching your attention, but Dr Phibes can be forgiven a sense of not belonging. For all the numerous pigeonholes which might seem to have their name on — Black Rock, squat-rock, progressive regression, the older-dance underground — none have yet welcomed them in. It's not a bad thing to live in your own space but, as That Petrol Emotion could tell you, it can get lonely there.

The House Of Wax Equations are

actually a stranger and more interesting band than they give themselves credit for. The list of influences they claim to have "invited out for a drink" is Coltrane/Gl. Scott-Heron/Television/Bad Brains. But it's The Teardrop Explodes, James Blood Ulmer, Yargo and Wishbone Ash that have actually turned up, and the results are more palatable than anyone would have a right to expect. The song lengths — seven minutes, seven minutes again — boogie most ill, but against the odds, time flies. Occasionally they plod, but mostly they float, and the longest number, "Moment Of Truth" is the best, a gentle but serrated open heart swell. Listening to this and the giant choruses of "Burning Cross" and "Deadpan Control Freak" it's hard to know why the band refuses to fit — maybe their disrespect for racial and genre boundaries just poses people off. Their refusal to make a song and dance about what they're up to doesn't make it any less compelling.

KEH THOMPSON

Dumb And The Ugly

Atmospheres Of Metal
DR JIM'S RECORDS DR JIM 6 CD

Perli

Perli
DR JIM'S RECORDS DR JIM 7 CD

Australian label Dr Jim's has a good line in powerful rock that avoids the comic book sword-and-sorcery trappings of heavy metal. This is music where fuzz-tone and feedback speak volumes — no need for a vocalist's histrionic posturing. Dumb And The Ugly kick off with a multiracial version of Jack Bruce's "I Feel Free" and proceed to so-fi metal ambience with opera samples and the sound of knives being sharpened. Good weird rock that can work in the background or blast you to hell.

More intrusive, though also more inventive, are Perli — a Japanese/Australian foursome playing drums, bass, samples, tapes and guitars. The music is a tasty onslaught of media soundbytes and incongruous musical styles anchored in an exhilaratingly obscure rock beat. The cover — an

operation close-up splashed in bamboo-strokes out of Jackson Pollock — is of course yellow, Penit's energy and tension aptly satirise Australia's paranoia about the East (their name appears on the cover in katakana). Rugged drum sounds bounce off Japanese folk wailing and ethnic reeds while classical quotes swirl above machine guitar. "Rotor Syndrome" is an excellent free improvisation. Vivid, fresh, heavy, funny-serious in all the right places. Penit are a Chrome for the 90s, and most welcome too.

BEN WATSON

Markus Eichenberger
Tuttnieb-Triebtat
UNIT UTR 4056 CD

Ned Rothenberger
The Crux (Selected Solo Wind Works 1989-92)
LEO LR 170 CD

These are both solo efforts, but while Rothenberger recorded direct to two-track with no technological jiggery-pokery, Eichenberger uses overdubbing on his nine instruments to assemble pieces with anything between two and 20 lines. The logic of committing improvisations — evanescent, ephemeral, denying value and excitement from its very transience — to a permanent recorded medium has often been questioned [see this month's *Great Lost Recordings — Ed*]. It might be argued that the additional step of layering further reflections on top of earlier thoughts spoils the freshness, the originality and the adventurousness. But improvisation is rarely entirely spontaneous. For most musicians even total improvisation, when done solo, is likely to be more of a personal meditation than an experiment in unmediated responses to the moment and the unexpected event.

Rothenberger has studied the *shakuhachi* for several years, and uses this Japanese bamboo flute on one track. Increasing familiarity with the instrument and its literature has tempered his usual preoccupation with processes, prompting a greater attention to tonal colour and nuance. There is



Leo: through Cadillac

Splastic: through Impetus

Unit: Wasserwerkstr. 94, CH-8037, Zurich, Switzerland

Dr Jim's: PO Box 45, Clifton Hill, Victoria 3068, Australia

JW: 5505 Valmont Avenue 188, Boulder, Colorado 809301, USA

Percaso: Rec Rec, Magnustrasse 5, CH-8004, Zurich, Switzerland

RecDec: These, 387 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2JL

Slane: 3 Theisger Road, Abingdon OX14 2DX

also a tribute to Maceo Parker, a player who in the radically contrasting tradition of the bar-walker also unleashes fiery explorations of the tonal capabilities of the saxophone. Eichenberger, too, evinces a concern for the textural potential of his instruments, and has based his pieces on speech and rhythm fragments. The technique he has employed is a contrasting take on linear development from Rothenberger's, placing the focus on patterns of sound masses, the structures set up by the interweaving and superimposition of two or more lines. Both men have created absorbing music with considerable variety and wit.

BARRY WITHERDEN

Failure
Comfort
SLASH 828 372-2

Band Of Susans
Vel
ROUGH TRADE/RESTLESS

Failure were recently reviewed (and dismissed) in another publication as just another example of grunge bandwagoning, yet in actual fact Comfort represents a far less populated undercurrent to the recent waves of American rock, and one that's certainly as interesting as the lo-fi brigade (Pavement, Trumans Water, Jacob's Mouse). Like Slint — or anything produced by Steve Albini — Failure boast an exquisitely dry sound, the polar opposite to grunge, almost Ludlute in its simplicity, yet one that engineers its guitars into girders and whacks the drum sound right up to the fore. Unsurprising then, that this record turns out to have been engineered by Albini, but surprising that Failure are from LA and on a major label. It's truly an indication of the power of Dry (as henceforth this trend will be known everywhere), after PJ Harvey's success, that a band who are so obviously inspired by Slint's *Spiderland* can manage to evade the A&R gatekeepers and have their records pressed by London, who will no doubt see absolutely no return on their investment whatsoever. Their loss is our profit, however: eight out of the 10

tracks are absolute zingers. Band Of Susans have developed in what they think is an equally ludlute direction. Yet their conviction that they are nothing more than a 50s rock'n'roll group updated for the present washes even less with each passing release. Vel follows closely on 1991's *The Word And The Flesh*, shoe-horning their obvious love for and debt to the 80s guitar orchestra composers Branca and Chatham into the equally minimal spaces provided by the four-minute pop song. It's as if Phil Spector's dictum about "little symphonies for the kiddies" has been updated to encompass more modernist, less classical stringwork. Band Of Susans have lately become something of a reassuring institution — affirmative, rather than progressive. Still, thankfully, they will probably continue until they drop dead. The only shame and quibble about this record is that they haven't included anything quite as magnificent as their version of Rhys Chatham's "Guitar Trio", when they actually did continue until they dropped dead.

JAKUBOWSKI
Flipper
American Grafshy
DEF AMERICAN 9 45120 CD

Lock up your plankton. The West Coast's one band No Wave are back. Disbanded in sad circumstances in late 1987 after the heroin-induced death of Will Shutter, they reformed last year when guitarist Ted Falconi chanced upon a suitable bass-playing replacement. Now, thanks to the patronage of long term fan Rick Rubin and his Def American label, Flipper have a higher profile than they ever managed at their peak. In some ways this is good. For all "Sex Bomb" status as the hardcore "Peter Gunn", Flipper always deserved more attention than they got, and a wider audience is definitely ready for the joyful sonic sludge of their classic albums *Generic Flipper* and *Gone Fishin'*. Plus the band get to include their flar for merchandise — already the proud owner of a Flipper frisbee and board game, it was hard not to be excited by the bn of "Flipper

chunks" ("Tuna Safe") which had caused such disgust even in the allegedly adventurous atmosphere of *The Wire* office. But they are playing a dangerous game: the point of Flipper was always that they went against the grain — they slowed down when everyone else was speeding up. Now, whether they like it or not, they are being sold on a "Godfathers of Grunge" ticket, and look where that got The Melvins. It is good to hear that huge overloading bass rumble and Bruce Loose's parched and drunken vocals again. The old sound is still there alright, it's Shatter's lyrics they miss most. Only "Fucked Up Once Again" has the instant anthem quality of old. What a shame the man who wrote "Life is the only thing worth living for" isn't around to play his part in a Flipper resurrection.

BEN THOMPSON

Fred Frith/ Francois Michel

Perith

Helter Skelter

RECDEC 40 CD

Chris Cutler/ Lutz Glandien

Domestic Stories

REB JUNE CD

No Safety

Spill

RECDEC 45 CD

Helter Skelter is an opera composed and conducted by Fred Frith with a French text by Francois-Michel Pesenti. The work was premiered in December 1990 but this is a studio recording from last February which has been substantially re-worked by Frith to include excerpts from live renditions. The music is convincingly performed by young amateurs ("crazy rock fans", it says here) from Marseilles, deschooled by Frith and then let loose on this demanding, abstract material. Much of the text is delivered in shouts and cries, though there are conventionally-sung parts, and the music is correspondingly fragmentary. Brooding rock and jazz components combine over 16 tense sections to produce a cohesive whole. In the odd apoplectic words of the translated sleeve notes, "music: thoroughly

attuned to its urban compost."

Like Mary Magdalene and Salome ("Black women who struck flames from history") are the protagonists of *Domestic Stories*, with Chris Cutler responsible for the lyrics and Lutz Glandien the music. The ensemble is made up by old muckers Alfred 23 Harth, Fred Frith and Dagmar Krause. Harth contributes some condescending sax but the best parts are the brief instrumental prelude and interlude pieces, which serve as respite from the suffocatingly pompous treatment of the subject matter. Pompous and dated, the only trace of humour is in the Beglud cover cartoon.

No Safety play twitthy New York art rock which is considerably more conventional than the presence of hip harpet Zeena Parkins. Zorn keyboardist David Weinstein (as co-producer) and turntable whizz David Shea might lead you to expect. Though the music rarely strays far from brainy four-square rock, the terse songs are forceful and well-constructed, if a little fiddly. There's plenty of trebly guitar and some jagged interventions from Shea (the looses Dolphin's solo version of "God Bless The Child" over one track), but a considered distance is kept from the gross-out strategies that Zorn's Pankster brought to musicianly rock.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Michael Gassman Quartet

Michael Gassman Quartet

UNIT UTR 4054 CD

Spinks

Spinks

KONTAKS 739 CD

Day & Taxi

All

PERCASO 11 CD

Three European groups here. They all tend to paint themselves into various corners at times but there's promise in a lot of them.

Trumpeter Gassman's post-bop set, from last year's Schaffhausen Festival, is interesting in the way it refuses any kind of festival-inspired freneticism. In fact the group is at its best when Gassman's playing is at its most reflective, as on "Coins", a theme which strongly recalls

Annette Peacock's "Touching". All the material was provided by the leader (almost inevitable these days) but there are too many changes of mood in the manner of mechanical transitions, so from about halfway you're constantly on the lookout for the next McGuffin. Calculation seems to override inspiration in the end.

Spinks is a Dutch seven-piece, conventional in instrumentation. The performances are in their own way conventional too, in that they reflect that particular brand of Dutch radicalism which emerged from musicians like Broeker, Menigberg and Bennink with the free scene of the early 70s. So there's nicely orchestrated sounds balanced by expeditions into the bizarre when saxophonist Joop Blank (who wrote all the material, so can be presumed to be the band's guiding light) gets into some snarling, growling, gurgling vocals — it has to be heard to be believed.

Day & Taxi is a three piece — bass, drums and alto/soprano (though Christoph Gallo could convince you at times that he's playing tenor). There are some pretty themes — bassist Lindsay Cooper's "Sprite's Tune" and "Blues Beside The Shoes" are particularly attractive and lead to some good interplay, though Gallo's "After Dinner" plods a bit. One problem is a certain sense of restriction which tends to develop as the disc goes on — in-house material can tend towards a closing down as well as an opening up of the imagination. Then they offer a version of Noel Coward's "Mad About The Boy" which is one of the best de-composing jobs I've heard since Sunny Murray's Pans band did "This Nearly Was Mine" back in 1969. It serves to emphasize the point.

JACK COOKE

Gebbia/Kowald/Sommer

Cappuccini Klang

SPLASCH CDH 383 CD

Jack Wright & Friends

Thaw

JW 002 CD

Since the late 80s, the Sicilian saxophonist and clarinetist Gianni

Gebbia has emerged as a promising new voice on the Italian jazz and improvised music scenes. Cappuccini Klang finds him in the company of veteran German improvisors, Peter Kowald (double bass) and Gunter "Baby" Sommer (drums). Gebbia's jazz background is much in evidence on these 20 short improvisations, and he's at his most fluent and resourceful when his boppy alto and soprano are out front producing attractive melodic lines. Kowald and Sommer's experience comes a greater authority and implied danger when the mood takes them into abstract realms.

Jack Wright's route to improv has also been via jazz, but mixed with sessions in rock'n'roll bands in the late 50s. *Thaw* is very much his album. The American's solo pieces on alto and soprano are the highlights, revealing a persuasive personality who can make the instrument sound lethal or cute and cuddly like a child's toy. There's always a forthright momentum in his playing, but the trouble is no one else on the album presents anything like a stiff enough challenge to him. I'd very much like to hear Jack in the company of some seasoned American or European improvisors.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Sylvia Hallatt

Slamming

MASH 001 CD

British Summertime Ends

Spy Among The Roses

NATO DK 53006 CD

Arc

Out Of Amber

SLAH 2DS CD

One solo showing — Hallatt's first — plus a brace of ensemble performances, collectively, these CDs present three very different facets of a composer-performer whose exacting and resourceful music has never enjoyed the public profile it deserves.

The Cagan edit that any sound source is acceptable lies at the heart of Hallatt's folkways explorations on *Slamming*: plastic and copper piping, kids toys, bowed bicycle wheels and British Rail tea-

stirrer are all far game in Hallett's world of sound, as are more conventional trappings like violin, Thai mouth organ, accordion, keyboards and trombone. Hallett uses these multifarious tools with great dexterity and focus. There is a rustic beauty in the way she combines singing with the scraping of catgut on both "Chilled Sky" and the title track, mirroring the coarse textures of the violin with her voice. "A Sathy Wake" and the lengthy tape collage piece "Soft Shell" are contrastingly elaborate aural tapestries, weaving real-time playing with ambient bed recordings; the latter is the riskier and more episodic of the two, yet Hallett's purposeful use of tape shows how malleable a material it can be.

The preoccupation with folk forms continues in the work of British Summer Time Ends, a two featuring Hallett alongside Stuart Jones (cello and trumpet) and Clive Bell (*shakuhachi* and *klarinete*). "Spy Among The Roses" combines East and West with a distinctively Home Counties quirkiness. Hallett gets her tongue around Thai pop music with the crackling "Honey Close Your Eyes", while Bell flattens Ray Davies's "You Really Got Me". Overall, it's a hit-and-miss collection with weighty measures of virtuoso playing (Bell's handling of the unwieldy Thai mouth organ, the *klarinete*, is first rate), mixed in with corny pop mannerisms.

Arc's improvised string pieces are comparatively sober affairs. Hallett on violin, bassist Gus Garside and cellist Danny Kinghill put in an empathetic performance over the record's 10 tracks, moving from the pastoral ("Distant Window") through the near macrotonal ("Circadian Rhythms") to the lush and dramatic ("Snare In The Woods"), sequencing them into a cohesive body that runs rich with variety and challenge.

DAVID BILIC

PJ Harvey

Red Of Me

ISLAND KPS 8002/514 696 COM/CLP

Poly Harvey's lyrical trappings comes stuck in the mind like black tar. Over flowing with obsessive madness ("Red Of Me"),

body horror ("Dry"), and Grand Guignol casting ("Soft Queenie"), they are strangely reminiscent of Tennessee Williams's tortured screenplays. Her schizophrenic character ranges through smouldering sensuality, abrasive assertion and banshee howl, swapping gender and afflictions at will.

The voice is a commanding focal point, combining a sense of strength and vulnerability with wickedly funny one-liners ("Tarzan, I'm pleading/Stop your fucking screaming!" — "Me Jane"). But *Red Of Me* is no one woman (freak) show. Drummer Rob navigates the music's serpentine tributaries, providing a reactive base for the trio's low slung rock/trill revisionism. Whether bastardizing the Blues on "Ecstasy" or kick starting a rockably roll during "Me Jane", P.J. Harvey manage to immortalize their indie rock base. They have also been well served by Steve Albini's crunchy production, which accentuates the music's breathless dimaxes and emotional turbulence.

K. MARTIN

Headbutt

Pissed Down

VINYL SOLUTION/PIGBOY ONK 13

CD/LP

Headbutt are three bass players plus two industrial metal beaters who have been gigging around London and the UK for the past year or so. On a good night — when they're possessed rather than performing, and singer/bassist Keith escalates to painful heights of exorcism — the band can hit the same white light as God.

This is the band's first LP and extends the territory covered by their previous singles and EP. The opening "Sandyard" is an ominous mood piece, "Duffelbag" features (Welsh?) female vocals underpinned by a bass-end MBV sound-mesh, "Through The Slides" suggests a murky S&M soundtrack with an experimental mix, "Adding Insult..." is generic Headbutt (marinic, Swans-like repetition, pushed-to-the-edge vocals), "Always Scraping Shit" would have made a great denuded power pop pop, and the album ends on

a low note with the dirge "Barbie Skirt". Attention to how these elements might purposefully cohere seems to be lacking, and ultimately the music's original cathartic purpose is diffused by the group's search for new directions. Try their "Lustick"/"Fat Elvis" (Pig 10) single, catch them live or track down New York's gut-wrenching Missing Foundation instead.

PHIL INGLAND

The Hilliard Ensemble

Walter Frye, Vocal Works

ECN 437 684 CD

We all tend to think of Frye, I suppose, as a link between the medieval strictness of John of Dunstable and Josquin's more fluent counterpart, but these 14 compositions show him to have been far more than a transitional figure. Very much a further development of Dunstable's innovations, Frye's music betrays no continental influences yet survives almost entirely from European manuscript copies. He was evidently much sung in Italy, Germany, Bohemia, even in Hungary and Sicily. His music was quoted in theoretical treatises, adapted and plagiarised by composers, and the notation of one of the items included here, "Ave Regina", is reproduced in at least three paintings. But for one who must, by 15th century standards, have been very famous, we know absolutely nothing about him personally.

Vocal Works offers a perceptive selection of pieces, illustrating most of his contributions. The melodic lines flow energetically with four-part writing that is very accomplished, the voices sometimes crossing a good deal and there being an individual use of sequences, variations, ostinato patterns and occasional melodic or rhythmic imitation. As Uwe Schwenker has suggested, in Frye's "Missa Flo Regalis" the upper voice is "like a trait of light in the vocal stratosphere, recalling the audacity with which the medieval master builders thrust the delicate tracery of their cathedral vaults to ever more vertiginous heights." Frye may have died half a millennium ago, yet these beautiful

performances by The Hilliard Ensemble reveal his music still speaking to us eloquently.

MAX HARRISON

The Honkies

All My Screws Fell Out

MEGAPHONE 006 CD

All My Screws Fell Out is the third release from Manchester-London improv crazes The Honkies. Spirited marching themes and barbed vocal chants occupy a fair percentage of the group's activities. For a quartet consisting of saxes, trumpet, cello, bass and drums, they make a big sound. Controlled mayhem is another way of describing parts of this album, and the controlled bit is important because how The Honkies organise and shape their material within this near party-time atmosphere, is what makes them so exciting.

"Ditching" is one of the more reflective pieces with shades of something South African in the sighs and swoops between the saxes. "You Know Me Already" entertains some devilish swing and "Before The Fall" sets up an interesting depth of field dialogue with echoing trumpet foregrounded by a Slavonic folk riff on cello. In fact, they pull all sorts of genres which get scuffed up and turned to their own ends ("Cake Shop" sounds like Albert Ayler and *Comerbert* era Gong!). But don't confuse the unpolished with the slapdash. This is an intelligent, entertaining group with a stock of caustic one-liners.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Akira Ifukube

Symphonic Ode: Gotama The Buddha

LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER DSA 54024 CD

Somei Satoh

Toward The Night

NEW ALBION NA056 CD

Godzilla and Buddha would be strange bedfellows in any country other than the mostly secular Japan, where mysticism and materialism share shelf space at temples and shrines dedicated to fertility gods, ancestors or your pet cat. Insofar as it's practised at all,

religion in such a climate is more thoroughly integrated with contemporary life, and the call to worship doesn't necessitate pulling a po face.

So there's nothing disrespectful in 79-year-old composer Irukabe teaming his Godzilla film music ("Symphonic Fantasia") with his "Symphonic Ode" to Gotama the Buddha. The latter is no less capable of holy mystery for its film-like scope. Admittedly, on first encounter, Irukabe's epic, sweeping orchestrations seem more appropriate to an Eastern Greatest Story Ever Told than to scolding Gotama's path to enlightenment. But its narrative thrust quickly takes hold, and its account of tribulations en route, revelations marked by tubular bells, is all the more capable of carrying a large popular audience for being closer to film music than sacred traditions. And the splendid vulgarity of the chorale finale has an undeniable spiritual uplift. Some irresistible storm sequences aside, the "Symphonic Fantasia" derived from the composer's Godzilla scores surprisingly packs a gentler emotional punch.

Though writing for cello, strings and soprano, Satoh's music is closer to Western expectations of Japanese arts that describe the Buddhist transmigration of souls. Long, barely altering string lines are repeatedly sounded against the void of night, as if in order to find the way to the other side. It's a lonely way, to be sure, but the lines enrich themselves the closer the soul gets to achieving the bliss of pure nothingness. The three works here calibrate the gradual shift from gloom and sorrow to quiet exaltation.

BIBA KOPF

The Jungle Brothers J. Beez Wit The Remedy WEA

If the tag "accelerated culture" has any meaning beyond being a smart phrase for media-literate novelists like Doug Coupland, then surely it's when it's applied to HipHop. Rappers used to lift from each other; now they borrow from their own past work. Self-referential sampling is becoming an epidemic

Vinyl Solution: through Pinnacle

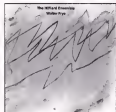
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among those artists seeking the comforting certainty of the music's old school — the process represents a rebirth for them as well as symbolising the cannibalistic nature of the music industry in the 90s. Public Enemy dipped their toes into this particular pool with their return to form *Greatest Misses* album, and now The Jungle Brothers have done the same with their new record.

Thus a track like "Book Of Rhyme Of Pages" offers a brief history of Hip-Hop through the rap, while "My Jimmy Weighs A Ton" takes the process one step further by using PE's ponderous "My Uzi Weighs A Ton" and mixing it with the riff from "Jimbrowski" of the first JB's album *Straight Out Of The Jungle*. This reprocessing continues throughout the second side, which is full of the dense, textured, bass-heavy beats reminiscent of the old style Jungle Brothers, but here buried deep in a mix of Black Noise, jazz echoes and strange ambiances.

By and large this playful approach manages to avoid self-parody and, if the old tunes really are the best ones, then you'll enjoy this

DAVID BIERER

Kanda Bongo Man
Soukous In Central Park
HANNIBAL NN 1374 CD/PC

Kanda Bongo Man
Sana
EO 306292 MC

More songs about trousers and girls. In its single-minded pursuit of cash and clothes, soukous has given rise to unparalleled crassness in African music and style. Although Kanda Bongo Man must bear much of the guilt for this, his own sweet, bubbling dance music remains unscathed and irresistible.

Central Park is basically a greatest hits live package, including such favourites as "Luz", "Yesu Christu" and "Sai". Guizants Nene Tshakou and Mimi Kazadonna remain from the 1991 group that cut *Zing Zong* but otherwise the band is all new, and they produce a lively, liquid group sound and feel, combining a velocity and relaxation sometimes missing from the studio recordings.

Sana is an import cassette featuring all new material, much of

which ranks with Kanda's best in its intensity and (even) passion. Music for the ass rather than the head. Dazzling.

RICHARD SCOTT

Salamat and Nazakat Ali Khan
Salamat and Nazakat Ali Khan
HANNIBAL NNCD 1332 CD/PC

Pandit Jasraj
Raagdan
WESTON WCD 10034 CD/PC

Gangubai Hangal
The Voice Of Tradition
WERG LC6356 CD/PC

N. Zahiruddin Dagar and F. Wasiuddin Dagar
Maestro's Choice
MUSIC TODAY CD A-91011 CD/PC

Hindustani vocal music is a vast and daunting genre. Though it lies at the very core of India's classical traditions it has proven less accessible to foreigners than its sitar, violin or flute equivalents. It is music which features the voice at its purest, most essential. The texts are really just vehicles for the tones — where the true meaning, which is devotion, is seen to lie.

Salamat and Nazakat Ali Khan recorded their extraordinary album in 1970. The brothers' voices str and rumble, passing through unfeasible vibrato-ed near-yodels, dissolving into incredibly dense climaxes filled with the most intricate shapes and outlandish designs. This is *khyal*, the modern, heavily ornamented improvisatory style, at one of its absolute peaks of historical development.

Pandit Jasraj's *khyal* is perhaps more readily understandable, his thick creamy voice warmer and more easily beautiful. The Pandit's reading of Raga Bhinna Shadja is an extraordinary tour de force. For the most part hovering around only three or four notes he builds a tangibly massive overall shape, his voice bulging forward from the speakers.

Gangubai Hangal and the Dagers both belong to the much older tradition of *ghazal* singing. This throaty style, which had almost disappeared a few decades ago, but which seems to be undergoing some small revival today, is

generally described as 'austere'. Although less free and improvisatory, these voices are no less extraordinary. N. Zehrudin Dagar (for whom 'music is a magnet which pulls me towards that bliss in which I lose myself and find God' and F. Wassiluddin Dagar sing a gentle *dhruwad*, savouring the tones as if they were exploring every cavity in their body, before finally erupting into a rasping unified climax.

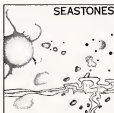
Hangal's voice, and that of Krishna Hangal, her 60-year-old daughter, form dark, dense, leathery lines one would hardly imagine could come from women's bodies. If *khayal* leaves one with a sense of fantastic impossibility, *dhruwad* seems to leave one with the unwelcome atmosphere of enormous, dense, almost exhausting thoroughness.

RICHARD SCOTT

Kinothek Percussion Ensemble
Volume 3 — INDUSTRY!
NO MAN'S LAND WRLD 873 CD

'Kinothek' refers to a method of film score production employed in the era of silent cinema, when a composer would present a catalogue of dramatic mood scores to a theatre music director who would then select appropriate music to accompany a given film. American composer Dina Hoover has adopted this methodology for a series of thematic mood projects of which *INDUSTRY!* is the most recent. Volume One was concerned with *Adventure* and Volume Two *Suspense*. It's Hoover's hope that the compositions are sufficiently stimulating to conjure up industrial scenarios, and that film makers will use this music in conjunction with actual footage.

Hoover's sampling and subsequent manipulation of industrial machinery achieves an intricately layered 'narrative' flow, but by being exclusively mechanistic his notion of 'industry' excludes the human dimension, the human relationship to machines, and so simply evokes images of cogwheels, pistons, gears, etc. Although the pieces are skillfully constructed, this apparent lack of an expressive dynamic doesn't really encourage repeated listening



and limits the application to the filmic image. However, as a statement about the rhythmic complexity of juxtaposed machines, the album is quite revealing.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Ernst Krenek

Jonny Spekt Auf, conducted by John Mauceri

DECCA 436 631 CD

Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Das Wunder der Helene, conducted by Lothar Zagrosek

DECCA 436 636 CD

Suppressing works of art under the label *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) was not the worst of the Nazis' crimes, but it was of a piece with their suppression of all 'difference'. Decca's series *Entartete Musik* reminds that, unwittingly, we have colluded with the Nazis' assessment. The series unearths works that we have ignored, even though the very fact that the Nazis hated them should commend them to our attention. In fact we have our own notions of musical degeneracy, and often we would be happy to bury what we don't approve of.

The Nazis' disapproval is not an automatic guide to quality, and both these operas, the first in the *Entartete Musik* series, have their problems. Krenek's *Jonny Spekt Auf* (1927) has often been labelled a 'jazz opera', suggesting some ghastly Euro-American hybrid. In fact jazz is a mere plot element, an embodiment of the future which Krenek hoped would rescue the superannuated European art music tradition. Such optimism. The character of Jonny, the jazz musician, is little more than a *Black And White Minstrel Show* caricature, and it is hard to take to his counterpart, the composer Max, whose Muse is a glacier (represented by a woman's chorus). But if we remember that the culture which Krenek viewed as exhausted was in the process of producing the Nazis, his plot has a certain political acuity. Approaching the *fin-de-siècle*, we too feel that classical music — if nothing else — must look outside itself for new life, and Krenek's opera has its contemporary resonances.

Korngold wrote the sort of music that Krenek hoped would be supplanted by jazz, and in many ways it's surprising that *Das Wunder der Helene* (1927) fell foul of the Nazis, for it contained elements that, in other circumstances, would surely have won their approval. A score of tumescence grandeur in their beloved Wagnerian tradition, a plot centred on a charismatic leader martyred for his vision. But the opera was denounced as 'Jewish desecration' and has pretty well disappeared from view. It is a strange piece with an orchestral score that throbs with erotic energy, at times almost threatening to drown singers and listeners alike. As political allegory, it still comes some weight even now.

Germany and Austria were the centres of European music in the 1920s and 1930s. Until more of the works thrown into the Nazi dustbin have been uncovered, there is an enormous hole in our understanding of history. These two operas make a worthy start to our history lesson.

NICK KIMBERLEY

Ned Lagin

Seastones

RYKOINC RCD 40193 CD

A late, neglected classic from the undersung and undersubscribed soundfield of fringe electronic composition, Lagin's *Seastones* was originally released in 1975 on the Grateful Dead's Round Records (But perhaps these two full versions can only now be properly heard on this high fidelity CD reissue.) The Dead's avid contemporary music supporter Phil Lesh plays felt (more than heard) bass, alongside the electronically masked sounds of guitarist Jerry Garcia and percussionist Mickey Hart, among other West Coast guest names. But the real star is the shoreline that inspired Lagin's composition. *Seastones* emulates the constantly changing patterns created by the ocean's waxing and waning tides. Making better use of Stockhausen's theories than the German *Gesamtkunstwerk* ever managed himself, Lagin groups single tones and clusters of sounds, created from compacted or stretched time sequences. Source

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musics are processed free of their natural qualities, so they all the more accurately simulate nature's submerged roaring. It seeks without hoping to find an underlying order to the seething chaos. But in abstracting its forming idea from the work itself, Lugin holds the piece together by permitting its components to draw apart. His designs inexhaustible, each fresh listening is a revelation

BIBA KOFF

Joëlle Léandre's Canvas Trio

L'Histoire de Mîme Tascos
NAT ART CD 6122 CD

Eliery Eskelin

Figure of Speech
SOUL NOTE 121322 CD

Hank Roberts

Little Motor People
JMT 514 005 CD

Joëlle Léandre's Canvas Trio comprises Léandre herself on bass and voice, Rudiger Carl on clarinet and accordion, and Carlos Zingaro on violin. Léandre's an exceptional improviser who's worked with Derek Bailey, Anthony Braxton and Irene Schweizer, and had a piece composed for her by John Cage. She brings to this album a strong, shaping compositional presence. There's a good deal of lyrical interplay between the musicians and the accordion adds a wonderfully floppy slant, dramatically extending the sense of texture that Léandre seems intent on exploring.

Tenor saxophonist Eliery Eskelin combines with Joe Daley (who also played with Sam Rivers' trio in the 70s) on tuba and Arto Tunçboyacı on percussion. The odd instrumentation gives each musician a quite distinct field to work in, a freedom which clearly suits Eskelin, who's previously recorded with a straight bass and drums rhythm section. His method is to use improvisations that don't develop from the written melodies or accompaniments, but act as self-contained units in themselves. Any sense of wholeness is supposed to arise from the unity of contrasts and harmonic shocks that result. His soloing is always challenging, continually spiraling off on unexpected, proudly incomplete

excursions. The tuba bass part, however, is rather lugubrious and tend to detract from the saxophonist's dazzling and often cryptic lines.

Tunçboyacı drops up again, along with Django Bates, on cellist Hank Roberts's *Little Motor People*, a quirky masterpiece, full of surprising detours and rich detail. Bates's contribution is superb throughout, particularly on two of the covers ("My Favourite Things" and "Donna Lee"), which are resurrected with telling exuberance and flair. Roberts's own playing lives up to the huge reputation he's acquired, full of feeling and invention. His compositions are lucid and open. The 19-minute "Saturday/Sunday" encompasses an enormous range of styles and degrees of freedom as it unfolds through its sharply-defined episodic structure. The way in which the three play around the sketched patterns of the mournful and musically somewhat de-centred "30's Picnic" is very affecting. All this, and "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" played on the "jazz-o-phone fiddle" (of barn dance tradition) to boot.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Albert Mangelsdorff/John Surman

Room 122D
KOMEX KCD 5037 CD

John Surman's recent whimsicalities have driven me from the room on more than one occasion. But with this record we move back in time to 1970 and those were the days when he was inventing a coherent new lexicon for the baritone saxophone, extending its range effortlessly into the alto register and finding a great deal to say within that surge of ideas and technique. At the same time Mangelsdorff was beginning to develop his mature breadth of expression: the title track finds them working as a duo and trying out all kinds of interesting ideas. What would have originally been the second LP side finds a European rhythm team moving in and it still stays good, if a bit different. These tracks remind you of when it was all so fresh and vibrant. When the world was young

JACK COOKE

Claire Martin

Devil May Care
LUNN AKD 021 CD/LP/VC

If you heard singer Claire Martin's debut *Album The Waiting Game*, you'll recognise the quality of voice that she brings to standard and original material on this the follow up. Her maturity and flexibility continue to astish. That sexy huskiness she shares with the fine white singers of the 1950s, June Christy and Chris Connor, means that playing on the in-car stereo isn't advisable (if you're male, hetero and want to stay on the road, that is).

The album repeats the very impressive line-up of *The Waiting Game*, with Jon Gee on piano and Jim Mullen on guitar. Rick Taylor's arrangements also feature Ian Ballamy on tenor and soprano saxes, and Nigel Hitchcock on alto flage, as lyricist, collaborates with Taylor and Gee on material with a more commercial direction. Here, the music's fine but the lyrics are a bit dodgy. Irving Berlin would never have allowed the stress on "diché" in "Can't Give Enough" (or some of the clichés come to that). Call me Mr. Benny Green *you'll regret you asked this — Ed*, but in the very tough art of the lyricist, there's a lot you can learn from the classics.

It's still a fine album I love the treatment of that unique and beautiful Arthur Schwartz song "By Myself" (it really is unique — see Alec Wilder's *American Popular Song*). And it's hard to imagine a better-judged and more affecting "Close Enough For Love", one of Johnny Mandel's loveliest songs, in a duet with Jim Mullen. Pull in before you listen to this one

ANDY HAMILTON

Mercury Rev

Boces
BEGGARS BANQUET

OK, I'm perplexed. Every now and then, you hear something which undeniably has a stamp of its own, but you can't for the life of you explain what that stamp is. You could package Mercury Rev under the throwaway tag 'eclectic', or allude to a farground sense of buffoonery in common with Pere Ubu, that gets you nowhere. Best

to say that this Buffalo six-piece — who scored critical acclaim with their first LP *Yerself Is Steam* — are about constant evasive shuffling from one (relatively solid) shape to another, around David Baker's elliptical rants. The voice is perhaps the weakest link — it simply evokes Midwest college kid discontentment, without the distinctive brattishness of that person from Pavement, say. There's consequently the feeling of a big, over-decorated box, but you're not sure who's shrouding inside it.

Mercury Rev, for all the anarchy, are too well-matched to flip into delirium, no matter how many rules the songs appear to flout. The fussy arrangements — rambling confessions laced with flute, brass, feedback and wandered-in-from-next-door splash piano — are very late 60s, very much about seeing how many divergent parts you can squeeze into one space before you get utopia. They have a great way of letting the feyness build up to ferocious wall-of-sound overkill, but they pull the same trick too many times. It could use more friction, more pulling in different directions. But they're definitely on (or up?) their own backroad, and I think I (think) I like it.

JONATHAN ROONEY

Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane

Live At The Five Spot — Discovery!
BLUE NOTE 0777 7 99796 CD

New York's Five Spot saw some of the most famous, and poignant, live performances from the modern jazz avant-garde — Cecil Taylor in 1956, Ornette Coleman's New York debut in 1959, Eric Dolphy and Booker Little in 1961. It's easy to forget now, but Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane were very much in that company at the time of their legendary engagement at the club in 1957. Both achieved recognition relatively late in their careers — Coltrane had only just broken through to a wider public with his renowned solo on the title-track of Miles Davis's *Around Midnight* the year before, and Monk had to wait till the 60s for popular recognition.

If you have treasured the few

studio sessions of the Monk/Cottrane quartet on *Reverside*, *Discovery* is essential listening. As Cottrane had explained, "We didn't officially make a recording live at the Five Spot, but I console myself with those that my wife made on our tape recorder." Luckily, for the rest of us, when Monk's son T.S. signed with Blue Note recently he brought with him copies of these long-lost tapes.

The sound is actually not bad. The main problem is balance — Cottrane is "off-mike" and is heard best when Monk drops out. The Five Spot piano sounds OK compared to the Dolphy/Little date (maybe it never got tuned in the interim).

But the music makes you forget the lo-fi reproduction. Ahmed Abdul-Malik and Roy Haynes on bass and drums replace Wilbur Ware and Shadow Wilson from the studio session. Haynes' tart, assured drumming is a highlight. On "I Mean You" Cottrane stretches out, eventually in "sheets of sound" mode, and this track has the best soloing "In Walked Bud" and "Trinkle Tinkle" are also fine efforts. Two geniuses of modern music, from the heroic period of modern jazz.

AMOT HAMILTON

Roberto Musci & Giovanni Venosta

Messages & Portraits
BER MEGACORP RSRPVC CD

If you equate the sampling of traditional ethnic musics with cultural theft and the trivialization of those cultures and musics, then perhaps you should avoid this CD. If, however, you regard this process of appropriation as being fundamentally concerned with decontextualization and transformation, forcing sound-fragments to behave differently in their new contexts, then there is much here to delight you.

Messages & Portraits is a 75 minute compilation of Musci and Venosta's mid-80s LPs, *Water Messages On Desert Sand* and *Urban And Tribal Portraits*. The method of composition is closer to the *musique concrète* tradition than the prevailing fashion for world

hat ART, *Soul Note*: through *Harmonia Mundi*

Konnex, *Chandos*: through *New Note*

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music concoctions, Musci and Venosta's treatments and manipulations of these ethnic field recordings are what really count, not some statement about intercultural unity.

The compositions are elegantly constructed, never overloaded with material and usually cohere around uncomplicated rhythmic patterns such as those provided by Venosta's piano. The treatment of ethnic voices is quite beautiful. "El Lamento" fuses a chorus of nationalities (Sya, Bahrain, Oman, Tunisia) with piano, synthesizers, French horn, kora and fragments of a Lutoslawski string quartet. There's a wealth of timbral detail, and happily the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. It's also very accessible.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

The Nectarine No 9
A Sea With Three Stars
POSTCARD DUBN 931CD

The second coming of Postcard Records so far has been more a case of clearing out the attic than making dramatic new discoveries. This, the third release from *The Sound of Early Thirties Scotland*, is by some distance the most necessary so far. David Henderson's decision to call his new band *The Nectarine No 9* suggests that in the wake of *The Fire Engines* and *Win* he feels no compulsion to tilt at the mainstream (then again, if *The Bluebelts* can have a hit, anything is possible). Beneath the juvenile smuttiness of this album's chosen title there lurks an intriguing piece of work. It starts with the evocative jingle of an ice cream van and ends with the pop of fireworks, but the intervening pleasures are not so simple. Snags of melody emerge in number and a distinctively off-kilter world view is expounded. Even the nearest things here to straightforward pop songs, "Don't Worry Babe, You're The Only One Awake" and "22 Blue", have a sharp and sarky twist. "Like a seed inside a paper cup waiting for the spring" is how Henderson sees himself, and he may not be wrong. His fusions of religious and sexual imagery certainly provoke more interest than Depeche Mode's, and

probably than Prince's
BEN THOMPSON

Arvo Pärt
Collage
CHANDOS CHAN 9134/ARTD 1603
CD/MC

Notes carved in stone. Pärt's unremitting solemnity at best transfuses, at worst gnashes like granite cathedral doors. His is a troubled faith, and not one which can be inscribed comfortably within the musical and verbal languages of our century. At first hearing, *Collage* is a mixed bag, six assorted orchestral pieces composed between 1964 and 1991, leading up to a premier recording of *Credo* (1968), a choral work with a prominent solo piano part. But with the ghost of Bach levitating so luminously among these transparent pillars, Chandos's selection reveals Pärt as an artist of metamorphosis, struggling to reconcile the great medieval and Renaissance music with his own shapes. The two 'collage' pieces from the 70s represent Pärt at the fulcrum of his development. *Collage Sur B-A-C-H* has a modern piano invade a harpsichord and oboe tolling at a sarabande, its first incursions bring harrowing chaos, although by the coda a troubled agreement has been reached. *Wenn Bach Henon Gezachtet Hatte* (If Bach Had Knew Bees) is a palette of instrumental effects that further demonstrates how history disturbs and seethes under Pärt's own musical ideas.

Credo doesn't represent today's leaner Pärt, but it's the only work on this collection that matches. *Passio* and *Miserere* for doubting ire and frozen fire. The 12-minute piece pits a full-throated chorus reciting the Latin testimony of belief against a battle for possession between divisively dissonant horn blasts and the serene *First Prelude* from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, introspectively performed by Boris Berman. So here again it's Bach who represents the spiritual heart of the piece, what Pärt brings is raging scepticism (fucking your stereo with the most thunderous recorded fortissimos I've ever heard) leading to a final, tranquil and private

ALBERT MANGELSDORFF JOHN TURMAN
1977 1978 New Megacorp disc of President Carter, Ronald



return to tonality. Neeme Jarvi's strength as a conductor is never to shrink from the scale of large conceptions, and helped by resonant sound he skilfully marries the stellar with the intimate.

ROB YOUNG

Eddie Prevost Band
Live (1977 Volumes 1 & 2)
MATCHLESS MHCD01/02 CD

Conspiracy theories notwithstanding, societies tend to get the art they deserve, and democracies get the governments they deserve. I used to ponder whether the gang which took office in 1979 moulded the self-interested, self-loathing society we have now, or whether we were already so greedy and lacking in compassion that we elected rulers who would adequately represent our ambitions. This music was taped when the mildly socialist complexion of the Labour governments had faded, and the best music was entirely submerged in a slough of pab. By the time it was released hope seemed dead.

Any fool can see what's wrong with society and art, but there are few holy fools who can come up with a worthwhile solution. The legacy of the Thatcher-Major crew speaks for itself, and while Punk seemed a healthy exchange for the sequined legacy of mimsy hippy-shit it was a fake Trojan Horse: generously manuring all around but utterly devoid of any real threat to the power-wielders or their and philosophies. Prevost has stuck to his principles, musical and Marxist, throughout the intervening years. As he says, the story is by no means over, but change does not come by music alone.

On yes, the music it remains vital, nimble and challenging, a valuable reminder that there are always some holy fools keeping the faith. This was a band that meant serious business, and Prevost was fortunate in his cohorts, trumpeter Gerry Goff, tenors: Geoff Hawkins and bassist Marco Mattos.

BARRY WITHERDEN

Red House Painters
Red House Painters
4AD CAD CD/CLP



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BG: PO Box 22, Bury St Edmonds,
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Like River Phoenix's character in *My Private Idaho*, Red House Painters' vocalist Mark Kozolek suffers from arrested development, but still he delivers piercing insights, almost by default. If RHP had been English they'd probably be signed to Sarah Records: they've the right combination of self-obsessed lyrics, slightly undercooked production and clean guitars laced with the occasional whisper of distortion. But they get away with it. I guess it's the consistency of Kozolek's confessional openness, over this album's 72 minutes you never once doubt the emotional pain he admits he used to dull with valium. The lyrics exhaustively sound the depths of the despair that follows as a result of defining oneself solely as a lover, but are shot with a wider angle and looser edit than their debut *Down Colorful Hill*, allowing for such hilarious self-bellittlement as "There goes my favourite rollercoaster/Next to the blue water/The one only cusses ride". Only "Mother" outstays its welcome: an uncomfortable 13-minute slice of blanchied psychedelia that ends with Kozolek's ungainly howling for the womb. The shorter numbers tend to work better, as if the struggle to compress experience into three minutes acts as an antidote to the longer, bleary bad trips like "Fun House", which too often lapses in incoherence. "Things Mean A Lot" conjures a swirling, slide-slipping carousel with its skew-whiff time-signature and meditative skein of piano and acoustic guitar, while "Down Through", "New Jersey" and "Dragon Flies" pick on precise moments in the memory that intensify the narrator's sense of being here, now, alone and fucked up. Unless they seriously get a life, the next album will be monstrous self-parody, but for now enjoy shedding a little dignity and joining the Painters on their descending climb.

ROB YOUNG

Bernt Rosengren Quintet
The Hug
DRAGON DRCD 211

Lasse Lindgren Band
To My Friends
DRAGON DRCD 227

Joakim Milder
Ways
DRAGON DRCD 231

Blue Connection
Live At The Clipper Club
DRAGON DRCD 237

Dragon's shift to the shiny format comes after a robust rearguard action for vinyl and it probably marks the end of black-disc recording in jazz. The new batch strongly suggests that they're making the switch at a point of high inventiveness in Swedish music. The diet is, as usual, mainstream-modern with sufficient idiomatic variation to keep expectation aloft.

At 56, tenor man Rosengren has still to match his live playing on record. The 1984 *Surrealist Meeting* (Phantasia) with Nasse Sandstrom was a taster of what he was capable of. *The Hug* confirms it. With guitar and piano providing chordal support, he works through a crisp set of originals and standards (Bud Powell, Jackie McLean, Kern, "A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square") and touches on a range of influences from Lars Gullin to Zoot Sims. Trumpeter Lindgren is an atmospheric player with a lovely variation of tone and some interesting compositional ideas, he's also Rory Bremner's spit'n'double. The three-part opening "May Suite" and the unusual "Two Bass Fishers Walking Down The Line" are testimony to an oblique imagination. The all-brass front line (Michael Raberg on trombone is excellent) makes a pleasant change from the ubiquitous saxophone of Blue Connection.

Mats Nilsson is the sole front man here, but consistently fails to use the space to any advantage. That's Joakim Milder's great gift. He sounded quiet, almost diffident at the Barbican last year, and his more subtle executions got lost in a busy foyer. This is, I think, his third Dragon (I've also got a thing on Opus) and it's definitely his most adventurous, making use of solo strings, a lovely wily sound on the opening track, and almost bizarrely decelerated tempi to create meditative and sometimes melancholy variations on original themes. His faintly rasping tone is

both attractive and effective, and, as always, he has a sure instinct for the right instrumentation for each track (trios up to septets). A lovely, assured record that should be ticked and followed up.

BRIAN MORTON

Edmund Rubbra

Chamber Music Vol. 1
GERVOGULLA DRYCD104

A pity this did not appear in the May issue because it was in May 68 that I had a review published in which I said Rubbra's 'favourite colour seems to be grey'. Time's passing sometimes brings greater understanding and I belatedly acknowledge — how can I have missed? — the strong emotional current of *Violin Sonata No. 2*. In fact *Piano Trios Nos. 1 & 2* are more characteristic, and draw attention to Rubbra often being insufficiently mindful of the specific qualities of each instrument and hence writing in a similar manner for them all. This arises from the insistently contrapuntal nature of his thinking, which, together with the warm tide of feeling, is his main point. That both intellect and emotion are so powerfully evident is very impressive, lyricism being directed into organic processes that confidently sustain large-scale structures.

Though Rubbra, who died in 1986 at 85, was a good pianist, he, again, did not write effectively for the instrument. Faced with the second movement of his *Prelude And Fugue On A Theme Of Cyril Scott* one is forced to offer the awkward judgement that here is an excellent fugue yet bad piano music. This is likewise true of the slow, chromatic and notably dissonant *Fantasy Fugue* of 1982, which, it should be added, includes some very deft contrapuntal moves. There is much skill and perception also in the performances by Kate Bailey (violin), Michael Hall (piano), Spike Wilson (cello), etc. and they are recorded with vivid presence.

PAUL HARRISON

Slant

Slant

SOUND & LANGUAGE SLCO 0001 CD

This is Slant's second album and the first to be released on their newly formed Sound & Language label. The trio of Chris Cheek, Philip Jeck and Smeared Jones claim that their music 'explores a raw edge between improvisation and composition', which means that these nine pieces have reached their current states through an ongoing process of improvisation followed by the selection of 'tendencies and preferences' They are, of course, still open to further mutation.

This dialogue between permanence and flux sometimes involves taking in and transforming popular musics within an experimental climate, using strict, dance-orientated rhythms in conjunction with the flexibility of free improvisation. Good examples are the rap-influenced 'Beach' and 'Dubli', where a throbbing dub reggae pulse is subjected to noise and collage interjections from Jeck's turntables. These also provide a restless backdrop to Jones's vocal lament 'Dark Blues' While her voice is undoubtedly a powerful instrument, some of its dramatic inflections are an acquired taste. With imaginative marketing, this album, which convincingly establishes links between the popular and the experimental, could have a wide appeal.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Soft Machine

Third
BGO BGOCD180 CD

Matching Mole

Matching Mole
BGO BGOCD175 CD

David Bedford

Nurses Song With Elephants
VORCEPIPT VPI 116 CD

Not that it's helpful to know this now, but Canterbury's 60s scene was the closest Britain got to San Francisco's heady craziness and high invention. Centred on Soft Machine, who once included the fabulous if erratic Kevin Ayers on bass, the scene made fuzzy, jazzed experimental rock, characterised by drummer Robert Wyatt's skewed scattings

By the time of their best LP, the double *Third* (1970), Soft Machine had moved on from the witty tail chasing of *One* and *Two*. Wyatt's 'Moon In June' aside, humour had been displaced by a shortlived brass frontline, featuring Elton Dean, that followed organist Mike Ratledge's convulsed fuzzed tone leads to the cutting edge of *apres 68*, avant jazz-rock. Of the four compulsive sideling compositions, Ratledge's 'Slightly All The Time' jumps out for featuring rock's most memorable stalk-bass part.

'Moon In June' was the last song Wyatt sang with the Softs on record, though he stayed for the anarist fourth. He then formed Matching Mole (get the French pun?) with various Canterbury connected luminaries. Wyatt's doodling, melancholy melotron pieces retain all their original charm, while 'O Caroline' and 'Signed Curtains', which fortify chart a singer's temporary loss of faith in the song, are at once away and affecting. The full brooded transrock fusions fare less well.

David Bedford once played in Kevin Ayers' *Whole World*. By day he was an avant garde composer without portfolio, writing these pointlessly different pieces that sound positively archaic today. Except, that is, for the six-piano setting of Kenneth Patchen's poem 'All The Sad And Lonely Faces' Spoke-sung by Ayers, his performance is all the more poignant for coming early in a potentially brilliant career that is still far — and ever farther from — being fulfilled.

BIRA KOPF

Tibor Szemzo

The Conscience
LRO CD LR 185 CD

The Conscience is a departure from Leo Records' usual celebration of contemporary jazz and improvised music. It consists of three narrative chamber compositions by the Hungarian composer Tibor Szemzo. Each piece combines music with spoken text and delights in playing off a variety of musical and literary discourses against each other.

'Skulbase Fracture' (1984) uses a text by P.G. Havicek which

skillfully and humorously interweaves medical, metaphysical, political and detective discourse to equally absurd and plausible ends. Szemzo's music moves effortlessly from chamber romanticism to the Jeno Olah Gypsyband's rendering of a popular Hungarian tune, dropping with sentimentality. A fascinating combination, it has to be said, lasting for about half an hour. Those who enjoy the intertextual conundrums of Borges, Greenaway and Robert Ashley should have a field day here.

'Optimistic Lecture' (1988) opens with a canonic form reminiscent of Steve Reich's phase patterns and develops into a large, funky, swing activity akin to George Russell's *Living Time*. Orchestra. This is combined with a recording of the Jewish cantor Marcel Loran, and a spoken text which is synchronized with the principal theme, note for syllable. Szemzo's control of these elements is superb and everything fits together to produce a complex, joyous unity. Finally, 'The Sex Appeal Of Death' (1981) has its child narrator (Szemzo's daughter Tanna) reading, at snail's pace, from an essay by Tibor Hajas, literally slithering from one syllable to the next with a lugubrious string quartet and percussionist in attendance. Although the work is atmospheric, it ultimately falls short of its august aspirations: nevertheless, it's hard not to admire the audacity and imaginative scope of these compositions. Try to give them a hearing.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Cecil Taylor

Air Above Mountains
ENJA ENJA 3005 CD

A Cecil Taylor classic, recorded live in Austria in 1976. Sections were excised for LP release — how they decided what to cut I can't imagine, since it's made up of two long, continuous performances — and these have been restored for the 76-minute CD. Cecil performs on a superb Bösendorfer grand piano, and the recording quality is excellent.

What about the music? I don't think anything better has been

written on Taylor's music than a long article by Ekkehard Jost in the *Village Voice* supplement devoted to him (June 1989). Jost points out that, despite his obvious reputation as a free player, there are multiple layers of order and structure in the pianist's work. The problem is, how to hear through the obvious virtuosity and energy to the underlying form.

Cecil has mellowed in the last decade or so, making use of pretty standard devices of Romantic harmony and a more lyrical aspect that results from that. At the time of *Air Above Mountains* though, that side is less in evidence, and the nervous, chattering energy saturates even the quieter passages I did, though, count about a minute of hushed tranquility 23 minutes into part two, before the next violent eruption, and that part does conclude with little islands of quiet based round a lyrical theme. But for the most part, this is Cecil Taylor at his most awesome, explosive and magnificent.

ANDY HAMILTON

Undernation

Anger

BRACE OUT 00 111 CD

Liquid Hips

Foal Injection

EMERY ENT 128 CD

Undernation, along with a host of young American guitar-slingers, have been liberated by the remarkable crossover success of Nirvana. Suddenly hardrock and grunge bands are potential unit shifters, and with Sonic Youth's current status, even dissonance is acceptable. Meanwhile, in the underground, rock's edges are being frayed by bands like Mercury Rev, Pavement and Tumblers Water, all ripping up the rule book to critical acclaim and varying degrees of success. Somewhere in the middle ground, between mainstream rock and a harder place, lurk Undernation.

Few tracks on "Anger" burn into the psyche and the rhythms are four-square, but there's plenty of passion and guitar firepower. Producer Martin Bisi gives the group a rough, garagey sound that

fits the material to a T. One song, "We BrainRoad", is a standout, grinding along with clattering percussion, gouging guitars and versed vocals before segueing into a brief acoustic coda — proof that they can break the mould when they try.

The Liquid Hips album comes complete with a detachable sticker proclaiming "Heavy Metal Funk featuring ex-Defunkt members". The group expand the Defunkt lineage — former group members trumpeter/vocalist John Mulken, guitarist Bill Bickford and drummer Kenny Martin are present — by riveting metal block chordings onto the accelerated funk fuselage.

This can be heavy-handed — "The House" recalls Led Zeppelin's jackknifing on "The Wanton Song" (not in itself a condemnation) but the group have energy to spare. Mulken's rockrap vocals ride the tide well enough, while the untrammelled guitar solos come right from the edge of mayhem, his acerbic trumpet adds fuel to the springheeled grooves of "Push". Heavy-Metal-Funk? Just goes to show how labels never tell the whole story.

DAVE MORRISON

Various Artists

Chess Blues

MCA/CHES 4-9340 4CD/TC

The importance of the Chess group of labels, built up in Chicago by two Polish immigrant brothers, is perhaps even greater than that of Motown for soul music or Blue Beat for ska. Chess caught the emerging sound of Chicago blues in its infancy, nurtured it to maturity and recorded it in the splendour of its prime. This set, containing 101 tracks handsomely boxed and copiously bookletted, shows what all the fuss was about.

The tracks on the first two discs demonstrate how the Chess sounds gradually crystallised during the late 40s and early 50s into a gritty, heavily amplified guitar/harmonica/piano/bass/drums take on the 12-bar blues. Little Walter's hit instrumental "Juke" was the first record to feature amplified harp to such devastating effect, while Waters' "Hoochie

Coochie Man" and Howlin' Wolf's "Evil" show how an equally tough singing style was evolving in keeping with the band sound.

The third disc, which covers the rest of the 50s, portrays the Chess blues in its full bloom and the ascendancy of the ubiquitous bassist/producer/songwriter Willie Onion (who plays on 20 of the 27 tracks and composed several of them). The surging power of Sonny Boy Williamson's "Don't Start Me To Talking" or Howlin' Wolf's rare "Break Of Day" is difficult to ignore, and this disc also includes the original and greatest versions of such blues standards as "My Babe" and "Got My Mojo Working", daisy-fresh after all these years.

The final disc covers the first eight years of the 60s, an era when the blues was in gradual but inexorable commercial decline. Yet there is little, if any, corresponding artistic inertia: occasional classics in the great 50s style, such as Howlin' Wolf's "Little Red Rooster" still crop up, but there is musical progression apparent: the gospel influence in singers like Etta James, the increasing use of horn sections, the advent of stereo recording in 1964.

Compiler Mary K. Aldin has wisely opted for a representative approach rather than recycling Chess's greatest hits one more time, and artists who branched off from the main stem of Chicago blues have their place: there are tracks by the likes of New Orleans bandleader Paul Gayten, boogie-woogie pianist Forrest Sykes and crooner Jimmy Witherspoon, which, as well as being enjoyable in themselves, help to create a rounded picture of the activities of the world's greatest blues label during its greatest era.

MICHAEL AITHERTON

Various Artists

Roots Piranha Soundtracks Into World Music

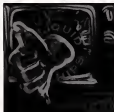
PIRAHNA PIR 48 CD

Various Artists

Piranha's Cuban Music: From Pirar De Rio

PIRAHNA PIR 37 CD

Pirahna is an engagingly aggressive little Berlin outfit determined that



Small is Beautiful and committed to presenting 'local' music from around the world, aiming to capture the music as it is rather than how some record company executive would like it to be. Their recent output is full of signs that, while they might not be in a position to sign the death certificate of multinational corporations just yet, they are becoming a force to be reckoned with, making terrific and often witty recordings which never lapse into mere documentary or academism.

Roots *Prähna* is as much a manifesto as a sampler, and does an admirable job, at least 13 of its 15 tracks are fascinating and compulsively repeatable. Aside from the familiar names such as Ali Hassan Kuban, The Klezmatics and Stella Obweshe (who has a nice series of albums on the label) are the terrifically manic Jova Stojiljkovic, Duvacki Orkestar, the Ethiopian Tukul band with their electric lyrics — whose own gritty set (PIR 44-2) is also well worth hearing — and some wonderful stuff from Mozambique.

Anzereo sees the label concentrating on a single musically very fertile region of Cuba uncovering both the expected — explosive rhythmic bliss, and the rather unlikely — including a pipe organ, a string ensemble and a very bizarre latin-jazz band. Lovely, joyful and spontaneous 'ground level' recordings which could surely never have been made in any commercial recording situation.

RICHARD SCOTT

Various Artists

Tresor II: Berlin — Detroit, a Tresor alliance

NOVAHUTE CD/NOVUM 14 CD/LP

German Techno is the unthinkable union of the previously irreconcilable factions of dance and the atonal underground. In Berlin things started to come together during that strange deregulated period when the Wall was neither up nor down, and the atonal strategists behind the Tresor Club opened up semi-legally in the Eastern subterranean vaults of a

deft store that moved West after the war. Groups like Einstürzende Neubauten had shown how you could regenerate life in Germany's ruins/ruined cultures through artful, ironic misappropriation. Similarly, later on, Techno's strange, desperate euphonias are induced through a not inappropriate combination of rhythm austerity and distressed ambiances.

Because these Tresor comps — the first was *Der Klang Der Farnile* — are a long time coming, they rely less on being ahead of the game than more time-worn virtues like musical interest. That is to say, there's more to listen to here than first meets the ear. The pared, bone-shuddering beats, barely embellished with almost banal keyboards (as usual), but their creators' computerised architectural designs and 3D mixes conceal and then reveal a maze of delights in their use of soundscape. For once the term sonic architecture is justified. Be they from Detroit (Jeff Mills, Underground Resistance, X-102) or Germany, Tresor's contributors

could be working on the *Autobahnen* of the future, laser tracing speed vectors across the globe. Pulse Versus 3 Phase's "Das Rennen" (The Race) is exactly that, a horsetrack competition of velocities marked out by van-timbred beats (any takers for ClipClop?). Noxious's "E-Zug" does something similar for the rail network. In invoking 70s trance technicians "The Cosmic Counters", 3MB cross Time dimensions to crosswire hi-tech and antique visions of space travel. And Detroit K Hand's "Mystery" charts a fantastic interior voyage.

On this evidence, Techno's energy reserves are inexhaustible, so too Tresor's vaults. Now Techno is running trance missions, there's every chance the music will go on forever.

BIBA KOPF

Swen Vath

Accident In Paradise

WEA 4508-91193 CD/MCLP

No, not one of Darth Vader's finest, although the name seems more

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than redolent of such scenarios. A veteran of 1986's *Electro Solo* disco experience, Sven Vath is a German DJ who is responsible for some of the most enterprising initiatives to occur in Techno and House in recent times.

Accident In Paradise (more on the nature of the accident later) is Vath's first solo album, and, unusually, it contains music that a club DJ will rarely get to play/mix live. Vath takes his Techno-cue not from the scatter-beat pace of Acid House, but from the airy synth-scapes of ancestors such as Tangerine Dream or Cluster. Memories of topographic oceans and Roger Dean artwork certainly inform Vath's titling policy ("Ritual Of Life", "Caravan Of Emotions", ahem, "Drifting Like Whales In The Darkness").

That's not to suggest *Accident* is — brought up to date — merely music for the clubbed-out and comatose, a patchouli patchwork of Indian tabla, digiplo and Arabic wail samples, (although there are plenty of these). The current single "Ritual Of Life" is a masterpiece of Acid dramatics — moody, intense and best played at 33 (the recommended 45 speed would cause an undetectable nose-bleed), while "Mellow Illusion" is a pleasant free-floating experience.

The accident? Close listening to the title track suggests it's something to do with a chicken fed into a digital sampler and given an acid treatment. I could be wrong.

LOUISE GRAY

Hugh Wood
Piano Concerto Op 31
COLLINS 20072 CD

John Caskin
Cello Concerto
COLLINS 20062 CD

Collins Classics 20th Century Plus series — premier recordings of British contemporary masterworks on affordable CD singles — has already given us excellent recordings of Taverner and Britwistle as well as introducing us to the offbeat Benedict Mason. Hugh Wood is a fairly old salt now but like so many vital composers in this country, perplexingly under-recorded. His *Piano Concerto* is

played by its dedicatee Joanna MacGregor, and appropriately the writing encompasses many of the styles and influences which she spans with such graceful energy. The first movement's bravura opening imperceptibly melts into a meditation on, if you please, Nat King Cole's hit "Sweet Lorraine", while the adagio contains four minutes of expectant music that barely raises its chin above the silence. As a vehicle for Wood's glowing range of colour, the piece impresses, and if it doesn't quite hold together as a single work it's more to do with abundance of invention than the lack of it.

By contrast, John Caskin's music carves out lyrical bowers for itself in the midst of harsh terrain, remaining fluently self-contained like a landscape in a convex mirror. His *Cello Concerto* is stark at first hearing, the soloist amok in a clearing pierced by clannet howls and buffets of brass. The forest image is apt as the work was initially started in parallel with a five-line stanza written by Caskin (and reproduced in the sleeve-notes) which contains contrasting images of randomly fluttering leaves falling on hard stone. The musical dialogue between grace and brutality appears to be Caskin's main concern, but in the final movement, "through silver air", the cello breaks free, slipping out and escaping into ether just when you thought the piece was wrung tight as a sonnet.

ROB WYONG

outline gospel

Nick Kimberley throws his hands in the air and shouts "Hallelujah!" for a new batch of God botherin' CDs

Nonchalant guitar chords, meandering piano figures, male voices humming in closest harmony: all is serene, God is in his heaven. For a few moments. Then a sulphurous blast from below, a storm-tossed baritone blast in quite a different mode breaks up the party. This is surely Old Nick himself. But wait, listen to what he's shouting. "One day the Lord laid his hands on me, children... he gave

me a song that nobody can sing but me... a whole lot of people don't like you to shout but I shout everywhere I go!" — and indeed he does, howling his adoration, strutting his "New Walk".

By the standards of European church music, the Swanee Quintet's "New Walk" is Dionysian *can-beto* rather than Apollonian *bel-canto*, yet its vocal decorum — rasps, falsetto breaks, mighty melismas — is as punctilious as opera. Recorded for Tennessee's Nashville label in 1959, "New Walk" is a typically ecstatic product of gospel's Golden Age. The lead is taken by the Rev Ruben Willingham, a shouter of the first order, demonic and loud. Like most of the great Golden Age groups, the Swanee possessed a sweeter vocal alternative, usually Little Johnny Jones, a febrile tenor in the Sam Cooke style who was the lightning to Rev Willingham's thunder. The Swanee never quite made it to gospel's Premier League, but they were regular promotion contenders, as demonstrated by many of the tracks on *What About Me?* Anniversary Album (Ace CDCHD 432), a single CD reissue of two Nashville LPs recorded between 1953 and 1962.

Nashboro was the South's major gospel label, a beacon for acts from all over the region. The Consoles — husband and wife Sullivan and Iola Pugh — brought with them from Florida a tortured, blues vocal style, made mellifluous by Sullivan's ringing guitar. Their voices preferred strain and pain to delicacy, the ragged tension in their delivery descriptive of the hard times on the gospel highway. Give *He My Flowers/Heart Warning Spirituals* (Ace CDCHD 425), another two-for-one reissue, provides a showcase for their archaic, heartfelt duets.

Gospel's *modus vivendi* is delirium, an optimistic ecstasy tempered with a desperate melancholy: heaven may be the brighter side, but on Lord, when will my troubles end? The tracks collected on *The Best Of Nashville Gospel* (Ace CDCHD 373) generally abolish melancholy to the outer reaches, but it slips through

in the adulatory sermonizing of Madame (true class) Gailmon Cook, in the dervish falsetto lead of the Gospel Songbirds, in the string-out harmonies of the Fairhead Four. Although Bob Laughon's sleeve-note hints at even greater treasure buried in the Nashville vaults, it is still a fine collection of the label's downhome styles. Fans of that *recherche* klom, black rockability, will be knocked sideways by the two tracks by the Radio Four, slap-bass, blues piano and all.

Whatever the context, any reference to a golden age needs to be taken with a shovelful of salt, still, I'd arbitrarily date gospel's glided era as the decade-plus 1951-62. But even if my carbon-dating is accurate, great gospel was recorded before and after. In the years before World War II, the Golden Gate Quartet perfected a gospel style founded on razor sharp harmony singing. The screaming and shouting filigees of the postwar masters were inconceivable, yet the Gates could build up a considerable head of emotional steam, as evidenced by *Travelin' Shoes* (IRCA Bluebird D7863 66063 2) 22 tracks recorded in North Carolina, South Carolina and New York between 1937-39. The Gates had a flexible attitude to God's music, and weren't averse to offering their praises through show tunes like "Stormy Weather", but whatever they performed the style was effortlessly precise, a walk on the bright side.

During the 1950s, the gospel highway was a notoriously tough road to travel, and many were the casualties. Yet there were many survivors too, none more distinguished than the Five Blind Boys of Alabama, who last year voted Britain after more than half a century of collective endeavour. At no point in their career would I class them as one of the great gospel groups, but they have always made fine music. *Deep River* (Elektra Nonesuch 7559 51441) is a miniature history of 50 years of gospel styles, from the jubilee of the title track through the gospel blues of "Reminiscent" to the born-again, have-a-nice-day optimism of

"I've Got The Love Of Jesus." There are clear signs of wear and tear in the voice of lead Clarence Fountain, but he knows how to put the strain to good use. Production by Booker T. Jones proves that this man knows his green onions.

in brief **clubtrax**

Kodwo Eshun finds hidden depths in the new Techno, HipHop and streetsoul melodies

Sven Vath's Ritual of Life (EYE Q RECORDS PR 0778 12") Despite a steady series of ambient releases aimed at the dancefloor — albums such as Frankfurt producer Sven Vath's *Accident In Paradise* from which these remixes are taken — the music hasn't really been drawn into the 90s club continuum. In a terrain where impact is measured by instant reaction and musculature, ambient music dissipates the nervous sympathy of the club sensum. Ambient is anti-dance — it drains energy, it turns the limber tautness of dancing into a slumped posture. Therefore, it is shunted off to a side room, as if its energies have to be contained separately. Vath's music, its weightless sensibility buoyed up by star and translucent flute, finds its analogy in the zero gravity sequences of 2001. Satellite commuters tumble and rotate in space. What should be a terrifying distortion becomes a comforting journey within a controlled environment. The lassitude of ambient listening pleasure suggests that the music does the rotation for you — you become body conscious, earthbound, while the sound moves through simulations of vacuums. This track provokes polar inertia: a sense of dead immobility while simultaneously being transported through vast distances. No longer beats per minute — instead, moments are taken from beats and expanded into another time frame altogether.

The Subplates Vol. 1 (SUBURBAN BASE SURRAB 24 10") The four tracks on this 10" EP from the prolific Essex hardcore label are

expressions of today's velocity boy fever. It's as if all the possibilities of every impact, crash and accident — which we attempt to alleviate via car bumpers, speed limits and breathalyzer tests — have been harnessed and somehow syncretized. If the horror, thrill and danger of accidents could somehow be harnessed to polyrhythms, then you would have a new aesthetic of calamities per minute. This EP is that aesthetic but with no big deal aggrandisement attached to it. DJ Hype's track "The Chopper" is excellent, running a hyped up escalator sound against a mockery of Sade-esque sentiment. It desecrates everything it touches by pushing the speed of living up against the speed of technology, of reproduction. The former loses out, and loves it.

Dr Phibes & The House Of Wax Equations: Moment Of Truth (OFFSHORE DRAZ 12") For anyone doing Black Rock, there's an existing trajectory to be explored. It reaches from Funkadelic's *Maggot Brain* to Herbie Hancock's *Crossings* and Sextant to Miles Davis's *Agharta* to the second side of the new Jungle Brothers' album *Beez With The Remedy*. But Dr Phibes aren't a group who can take the weight of this path of black noise. Their new single is a grey drizzle, hopeful harmonics dragged helplessly to earth by mundane vocals. The content isn't particular enough to Black British experiences to hold my interest. Black Rock in the UK should be the name for an expansion of black identity, a redefinition of the limits of black romantic imagination and also a decolonisation of the traditional Black vs White, Soul/Funk vs Rock/Techno opposites. It should be the name for an identity rethink, a consciousness overhaul. Black Rock needs its own Smiths in order to get a sense of what Greg Tate calls "vulnerability with attitude". There's a need for vulnerability with no apologies, for self-indulgence, for an inward looking self-obsessed black narcissism. All this is what Black Rock should be and Dr Phibes aren't up to it. I dream of a group who will come one day and will do all this. They will be called

Black Assassin Sam and they will overturn everything. In my lifetime preferably.

The Beatznuts Intoxicated Demons (RELATIVELY VIOLATOR BSE61-1114-12") Longtime NY producers for the Jungle Brothers and Kuncus George, this debut EP impresses with its fine, ambitious jazz-infected production skills. The eccentric, micro-assassination fantasy which ends "Story" is dazzling. In fact, the "skits", five out of the 10 tracks on this 20 minute EP, do a lot of interesting things in a very short time. Serious HipHop is committed to a wake-up call, to a rational attack on the mediated false consciousness of its audience. Skits are the pratfall, the fall guys to the stand-up theory of HipHop's militant messages. They are the dramatization of a specific political unconscious. Wondering, carnivalesque, serious and comic, these digressions have recently moved in from the margins of HipHop's broadcast technique. Where a group like The Pharcyde score with the picaresque journey of "If I Were President", The Beatznuts go for all out fracture, words tailing off, music collapsing in on itself as hyper-awareness gives way to disconnected daydream.

Psyche/BFC Applied Rhythmic Technology (ART 3 12") BFC release on a new label for Detroit producer Carl Craig aka Psyche aka BFC. On this EP, Techno is Black Mystery restored. Roland Kirk couldn't have known (or maybe he did), when he wrenched the shattering disgust of "Black Mystery Has Been Revealed" out of piano, broken glass and whistles, that late 20th century pop culture would become the triumph of Black ambition, a series of identifications, reactions and assimilations of Black impulses of invention and triumph through oppression. Carl Craig takes up music from the point when Miles Davis turned his back on audience's adulation and admiration. He takes the postural semantics of that aggressive refusal all the way out into a principled invisibility. This music doesn't have a visual register. The icon system, the videogenic props, the entire industry of scope attachment just

isn't there and so Techno collapses into inscrutable mystery and sonic awe. The second track "How The West Was Won" (hear it as "How The West Was One") is a lament for the world of differences Techno leaves behind — flanged guitar tones and mournful synthesizers play off delicate rimshot drum patterns. "Noodle Soup" is the faintest hint of an a capella loop stifled with misery, while "Sleep" is barely there at all, infinitely subtle ripples and perimeters of sound offer up circles in which sighs and groans are engulfed and drowned. Carl Craig and the music media, both print and visual, are incompatible; his music is lamenting something they don't even know is over yet.

Various Artists: Cultural House: Selected (KULTH 1 LP) Brilliant compilation of freeform ephemeris usually grouped and ignored under the name of Garage music. Producers such as Victor Simonelli (who used to be Critical Rhythm), Lennie Fontana and Victor Romeo, and labels such as Magnet, Velvet City and X-Ray, are important and unrecognized black music talents. They work under careless project names and give conversational candid-but-care-less titles to their music. For instance, T.M.V.S., which simply stands for the producers' initials, loop the opening bars of US swingbeat who wonders Sha's track "If I Ever Fall In Love", and generate their own track "Don't Be Shy". The former is a simulated harmonic interface of ballad and rhythm. The latter becomes the butterfly to Sha's slightly sluggish caterpillar, turning into a sparse intricate interplay of off-the-beat rhythm and warped variations on a capella. In fact, the more perfunctory the title, the more chiselled the music, which favours bottom end arrangements and male vocal yearning over the top note diva pitch of more mainstream House. □

(Independent dance music 12"s and LPs are available through Greyhound, Record Corner, Revolver, Pinnacle and specialist dance shops.)



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Letters

Back To The Future

Paul Steeples accuses me of "rewriting history" in my article on Ennio Morricone (*The Wire* 110). "Guessing" is more like it. Having done a little research (for a change—Ed.), I admit my description of the Fascists "stamping out the 'art of noise' of the Futurists" was misleading. The point I was trying to make was this: despite Futurist-supremo Filippo Marinetti's vociferous support for the Fascist cause, once in power Benito Mussolini did not reward him by sponsoring Futurism in the arts. The Fascists favoured neo-classicism, reviving all the features of the Roman past that the Futurists wanted to destroy (particularly evident in architecture).

According to Harvey Sachs in *Music In Fascist Italy* (a detailed examination of Italian musical life between Mussolini's march on Rome in 1922 and the American invasion in 1944), Mussolini was well received by the Italian intelligentsia, composers—including a few modernist ones—gratefully accepted his stipends. Both Schoenberg and Stravinsky were performed in Italy in the 30s (the latter was an enthusiastic admirer of *Il Duce*). However, with the outbreak of World War II and the alliance with Germany in 1939, anti-semitic edicts meant that Second Viennese School atonality was branded as the musical wing of the international Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy. As for Ezra Pound, his early enthusiasm for George Antheil's *Ballet Mécanique* was forgotten in his propagandistic adulation of Viviani, which was Italian-chauvinist and racist in the extreme (*Ezra Pound and Music: The Complete Criticism*, ed. R. Murray Shaffer, has some shocking material). As self-conscious promotion of the autonomy of technically advanced art, the avant-garde is politically

volatile, but precisely because of its commitment to an art which is equal to the modern experience, it requires an internationalist perspective. In this respect it is remarkably (like working-class politics) socialist, becoming nationalist and militarist only by reneging on its every promise, as Hitler and Stalin demonstrated so bloodily. This is why those of us who refuse the vory-tower interpretation of modernism put class struggle and internationalism high on the agenda.

Ben Watson, Leeds

Aktion Confusion

* The Vienna Group were showcasing acts of mutilation in their 'gigs' (one of them actually died). * (Mark Singer, *Art Show Eat This, The Wire* 111)

Yes, Rudy Schwarzkogler died, but no, not at a 'gig'. Schwarzkogler had been diagnosed as schizophrenic by the medical authorities and, rather than see him incarcerated in an asylum, members of the Viennese Group volunteered to care for him. One day he evaded their care and fell from a window.

The mythological end to his life, the one in which he inflicts a mortal wound on himself by cutting off his dick on an Aktionist event, was promoted by an American hack who saw Schwarzkogler's staged photographs at the *Documenta* exhibition in Kassel, Germany. How he managed to fuse or confuse these photos with the more sensational concept of a performance death I don't know, but the myth was consolidated as commonly held belief through its repetition in other publications, notably the book *Environments And Happenings* by Adrian Henri.

The version I have of Schwarzkogler's death was told to me by a Berliner called Florian Cramer. He was compiling material for a magazine entitled *Fle* and was

wondering if anyone had heard of a performance artist who had devised a machine that would randomly amputate parts of a performer's body. The artist died when it amputated his head.

Damian Abbott, Epping

Kant Understand It

As a subscriber to *The Wire* for about half its life I think the time elapsed since the Michael Jackson cover is enough for one to dispassionately appraise the magazine's critical worth, with particular attention to the issues since Mark Singer became editor of it. I assume you'll be interested in my opinions.

Since I used to appreciate the attention granted by the old *Wire* to artists like Anthony Braxton and Derek Bailey, I haven't cried for, say, Dexter Gordon being replaced by rap. True, I would have wished for more space being granted to the avant-garde, but let's not be picky, right? More interesting, in my opinion, is to evaluate the quality of the innovations.

Now I hope you all HAVE FUN STARTING ARGUMENTS, as Mr Singer stated in his first editorial, because this reader isn't having any! The reason(s)? First, too many times I get the impression that the arguments in question are started in cold blood. More important, I think that sometimes a "theme" is chosen, and then the facts made to fit. I mean there is too little intellectual clarity

While too many US magazines fly a little too close to the ground, a problem which seems endemic to a lot of English press is going up to the stratosphere. If you remember the old *Monitor* magazine you'll get my meaning. Sure, it's a pleasure for me seeing that Ed Baxter has clearer ideas now compared to when he wrote for the *ReR Quarterly*. But people like David (Ball of Confusion) Toop and (eh, eh, eh) Hopey Glass should have clearer ideas before subjecting the reader to their overschooled, incomprehensible doggerel. The Malcolm X piece (*The Wire* 109) had the Man turn in his grave like a washing machine.

Regarding Mr Singer's sentence "any critical journal's value comes not in the 'facts' (which are only buried opinions)" "Do you really believe this? I think *Mythology From* was a good book—given its author's typical American perspective (Music=songs, songs=lyrics+their importance for The People). But after so many years we need more facts—not 'facts', mind you. Were the artists in the T.A.M. Show 'all clear'—whatever the word meant" (!?) If even people like Nelson George and Vernon Reid can't agree whether the guitar was widely accepted by black youth... well, we have a long way to go.

I could go on. But this is the point I want to stress. It's clarity we need—conceptual clarity—first and foremost. And Facts Not Opinions (Don't you English people study Kant anymore?) Of course, the easier to understand us, the easier to attack us. Is this what we fear?

Giuseppe Colli, Catania, Italy

As to "facts", the point I was making was just that too many of them seem to be supplied by the yard these days, and never questioned. As to Kant, didn't "torture" go sour on you? The synthetic a priori—the fact both intuitively and logically true—went west when Lobachevsky proved the possibility of non-Euclidean (curved) space. Even if it didn't, definitions of genres—what Marcus might mean by "rock" (indeed, what Rod might mean by "guitar")—are tautologies, either synthetic or a priori. Is there really no agreed starting point, and if there is, would we get any where useful if we began there? Aesthetics is also subject to Zeno's paradox—Ed

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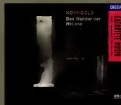
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